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THE

CROWN WARD.

BY ARCHIBALD BOYD,

AUTHOR OF

"THE DUCHESS," "THE CARDINAL,"

&c., &c.

Nurse. His name is Romeo, and a Montague,
The only son of your great enemy.
Juliet. My only love sprung from my only hate!
ROMEO AND JULIET.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL II.

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THE CROWN WARD.

CHAPTER I.

REPLENISHING THE EXCHEQUER.

Bowes had been informed of the wishes of the King for his presence, and hastened to obey them. Upon former occasions (for the perpetual penury of the Monarch, had made such summonses frequent) the only feeling with which he had contemplated the approaching interview, had been that of amusement or indifference. On the present occasion, however, when so much depended upon the result, he could not divest himself of a certain feeling of anxiety.

"I have power over James," muttered he.

"Any man with a well-filled purse, has the prodigal at his bidding. As for the Queen, there is a certain secret that I wot of, which, if whispered abroad, might send the daughter of Denmark to dungeon or scaffold. That secret shall bend her to my will. She may, as Fowler says, love the girl well; yet if I read the fair Anne aright, her selfishness will prove stronger than her affection. Two then, of the three, must do my bidding. But the third—Mistress Mary." He paused for awhile. "A brave girl," continued he at length, "if all be true they say of her. But would she accept me, who might be her father? Why not? A woman who goes beyond her sex—belongs not to her sex. Let her discard with indifference ribands and laces —let her turn away from tent-stitch or jewellery, she may be a nobler creature or a less, but she is no longer a woman. She belongs to the subtler intelligences, and is swayed by them; gives them her respect, her sympathy, her love. And such, they whisper, is the daughter of the Cessford—one of a loftier spirit than her fellows—one panting for eminence and dis

tinction, and power; and where, save in myself, will she find any who can place within her reach, the object of her aspirations. But I waste time in these visions. I must to this sottish King; else, like the man in the Eastern tale, I lose my Vizier-ship, by passing in dreams, the moments that should be spent in action."

He descended to the street, as he spoke, and followed by a dozen blue-coated serving men, each with target at back, and sword at side, he made his way on foot, towards the palace.

He soon reached his destination, for the distance was but small; and he now awaited the presence of James, in an adjoining chamber—arrayed in all that splendour of attire, of silk and velvet, plume and jewellery, which the fashion of the day required; and which, however contemptuously regarded by their wearer, was necessary, alike to mark the dignity of the sovereign he represented, and his respect for the one, to whom he was sent.

He was not kept waiting. They who are known to have money to give, are seldom made

to dance attendance upon those who are eager to ask it, and in a few minutes, the Majesty of Scotland shambled into the room. It was a strange contrast—the man of theories, and the man of practice—the one wise in the knowledge of things past, and the other (whatever might be the merits of his education) confining his interests and directing his talents, only to things present. Yet the differences of mind, were, in some degree represented by their external embodiment. The King—unwashed and uncombed, his dress ragged, his linen stained, his eyes rolling, his speech stuttering, his gait ungraceful; and the envoy—grave, almost formal, but with compressed lips, and deep-set clear gray eye, all speaking of inward energies, ready at their master's will, to leap into action.

"How's a' wi' ye, Sir Robert," said James. "I bid ye welcome back to Court."

"I thank your Majesty. Ill health must be the excuse, as it has been the cause of my absence. For the last week, I have been confined to my lodgings in Edinburgh, and am but now able to appear in your presence."

"And ye hae nae doubt heard the news?"

"To what, Sire, do you allude?"

"Essex is in the Tower."

"Yes, I heard of the arrest of Lord Robert."

"And what think ye o't?"

"I think," said Bowes, "that it would be wrong in me to express any opinion with regard to the acts of my Sovereign."

"Weel, weel, man," said James, "I hae nae wish to seduce you, into Leze-Majesté, but I'm sorry for the Devereux — sorry on his account, and on my ain."

"I can understand the excellence of your Majesty's nature, making you feel pain for any man's calamities, but I confess I cannot see how you are personally affected by his."

"Why, my freend," said James coaxingly, "I may tell you in confidence, that I was about to employ his intercession with my gude sister of England, for an addition to the sma' allowance she makes to me annually."

"Small allowance does your Majesty call it? permit me to doubt the propriety of the phrase. It amounts to twenty-four thousand pounds Scots."

"Twa thousand English, ye shuld say. Thae Scotch expressions of value are utterly vile and contemptible, and its no worth ane's while using them."

"Call it, Sire, call it by what name you will: it is a large annual sum, to be paid by one independent Sovereign to another."

"Weel, weel, Sir Robert, that may be, or may no be; but I tell ye frankly, I canna live on't."

"One would suppose you were a beggar?"

"If ye had said a Gaberlunzie, ye wad na be far wrang."

"Yet you have the Crown lands?"

"Nane to speak o'. Ane o' my forbears, David Bruce, gied the tae half o' them awa to the monks, for the gude o' his soul, as he ca'ed it. Eh! he was a sair saint for the Crown!"

"Yet when John Knox sent the rooks adrift, there must have been some pretty pickings still remaining."

"What's the good o' gliffin' the corbies, if there's nae ane by to herry the nests. My grandmither the Regent, was a Roman."

"So the crown of Scotland got nothing."

"No a bodle."

"And what became of the Monastery lands?"

"My Lord of Mar spulzies ane abbey—my Lord of Lennox anither. The Earl of Moray grips this ane—the Earl of Angus taks that."

"And you?"

"Od the deil a thing they left me; neither Kirks nor lands. The Barons took a'. So ye see I'm as puir as Job."

"I cannot comprehend it."

"If ye were to ripe my pouches, ye wad comprehend it easy eneugh. There's no a bawbee in them."

"Still it was only about six months back, that you received thirty thousand merks from the citizens of Edinburgh, for the riot excited by the Calvinistic clergy—where is it?"

"Whar is't! whar's last winters snaw? melted awa—gane—disappeared utterly."

"Thirty thousand merks spent in six months! It is, I repeat, incomprehensible. If you dressed like the Arch-Duke, or like the King of Spain, crowded your palace with the chefs-d'œuvres

of Titian and Velasquez, the expenditure might have been possible, but there is nothing here," continued he, casting his eyes around the room, "to convict your Majesty of extravagance."

"That's exactly what I say," said James, complacently. "If I hae a vice, its my economy,"

"But the money is gone?"

"Every farthing o't"

"And yet gold pieces are too heavy to fly away."

"If they hae na wings of their ain, they hae legs of ither folk. There's that greedy gled the Chancellor—he's ay itching for siller; and then there's Tam of the Cow-gate—he has the nose of a sleuth-hound for coined money; and he has nine pouches in his breeks, and is never content but when they're a' fou. And that souple-tongued chield, Tam Fowler—he is ay ca'ing me his dear maister, and a dear servant I wot weel he has been to me; and then there's a wheen mair, and sae,"—and James thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and with rueful countenance, and a step intended

to express desperation, shuffled across the room, the personification of an injured man.

"I see," said Bowes. "I comprehend at last. Where the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together."

"Just that! There are certain texts in Scriptur, that hae ay appeared to me to possess a wonderfu' force, and preceesion, and proprecity in their language, and that's ane of them."

"And so your Majesty's means are exhausted."

"Utterly, and that's the reason why I wanted especially to see ye, for I doubt not that my sister of England wad relieve my necessities, if ye just gied her a nudge about them."

"Impossible! I would not dare to make the application."

"What for no, man? She is as rich as Crœsus. She is ay making 'progresses' as she ca's them; and the ane gies her a grand silk gown, and the ither, a handfu' of diamonds, and the third a purse with a hundred gowd crowns inside o't. Eh! ye're a grand people, you Englishers! De'il a ane here has ever the

discretion to think that I might be in want o' siller, and no' a compliment or propine do I receive, except at Christmas, and that's only ance a year. I wuss it cam every day o' the week."

"I am sorry for your Majesty, but I repeat, I dare not apply to my mistress."

"Weel, weel. Ilka man buckles his belt his ain gait."

"But I think I could suggest a better plan to your Majesty."

"What's that?"

"The royal wardships."

"A' gane, a' gane, already; at least a' that I could raise money on. I gat five thousand merks frae Athol, for that of the young Earl of Murray; and three thousand mair frae Huntly, when I married him to my kinswoman, ane o' the Lennox lasses, but its a' gane lang syne."

"And there are none remaining?"

"Nane worth speaking o'."

"And the young ladies of the Court? Are none of them Wards of the Crown, whose

marriage might replenish the royal coffers, and whose beauty might induce the purchaser not to higgle too closely about the price?"

"Nane—nane. Ay, now I think on't, there's ane of the Queen's maidens, Mary Ker. She's heiress of Drummelzier, under her grandfather's entail, and a Crown Ward."

"The girl is beautiful, and I should have thought her marriage might have furnished some ducats for your Majesty."

"Why, no. The young jaud hauds her head sae high, that she rather scares the men. There's nane asking her price."

"I am sorry for their want of taste."

"Sae am I. Deil doubt it: for at this preceese moment, it wad be a great convanience to me, if some ane, with plenty of siller in their pouch, fell in fancy wi' her. But I want a thousand merks for her wardship, and that's ayont the maist o' them. Eh! there's a grand idea come into my head. Folks say that ye are as rich as the bank of Venice. What for should na ye marry her yersel?"

"Your Majesty forgets that I am old."

"The better able to guide a thochtless young taupie."

"But I am in mourning for my late wife. She has been dead scarce a twelvemonth."

"And how lang wad ye be mourning? The man that's ay greeting will sune hae sair een."

"But I have no wish to marry again."

"Gude guide us! Div ye no mind what St. Paul says, 'marriage is honourable,' wad ye set yourself up against the Scripturs?"

"But I am not in love."

"Div ye think that I was in love, when I married? Naething of the sort. The Three Estates of the kingdom keepit ay deaving me with their solicitations to tak a wife, but I wad na listen to them."

"And to what then are we indebted for the presence of your amiable consort?"

"To my sense of duty, man—to my sense of duty."

"Indeed."

"Fact as death. Ye maun ken that the Orkneys and Shetlands belanged of right to the crown of Denmark. We held them simply

upon wadset, or, as ye wad say, unredeemed mortgage. Now ye see when that reforming billy, Luther, set the world in a steer, the auld King of Denmark took on wi him, and grippit the revenues of seven bishoprics. So his son, my gude father that was to be, had siller in his pouch, and he wanted to pay up the wadset money, and get back his islands."

"An awkward proposition for Scotland."

"Ruin, man, utter ruin."

"And how got you out of the difficulty?"

"Why the auld man chanced to hae twa dochters—ilka lass o' them, *plenis nubilis annis*—and he let me ken privily, that if I wad tak ane of them aff his hands, I micht keep the islands as her tocher."

"And what did your Majesty."

"What did I, div ye ask? No as you do. *I* did na stand shilly shally, *I* did na keep objecking. Na, na. Duty said 'Agree to the match,' and I accepted at ance.

"Self denying no doubt; and yet, considering the beauty of Queen Anne, I cannot compassionate you."

"The beauty of Queen Anne quotha! What has that to do wi the maitter. It was na her I was to hae married ava. It was her elder sister, the Princess Elizabeth, that I was betrothed to. But the hunting was main gude that year, and I was maybe a wee bit ower slack in the wooing, and so they wad na wait and——"

"Married her to some body else."

"Just sae—to the Duke of Brunswick."

"That was awkward."

"Nae doubt. But what was warse was, that my negleck, as they ca'ed it, had set their birse up, and sae they gied me just sax months, to mak her next sister Queen of Scots, or gie back the islands."

"So you hesitated no longer."

"Na—na. When I found that the interests of the monarchy imperatively demanded the sacrifice, I could na stand out nae langer; sae I married. *Dulce et decorum est pro pátria mori.*"

And the King folded his arms, and flinging himself into an attitude, did his best to assume the character of an old Roman.

"It was magnificent," said Bowes, clasping his hands, and looking at the royalty of Scotland, with apparently intense admiration. "Since the days of the demi-gods of the great republic, there has been nothing like it. What patriotism! what self denial! what continence! The younger Scipio could not have acted more nobly."

"The younger Scipio, indeed!" spluttered his royal gossip—never satisfied with any adulation, however fulsome. "Wad ye compare him with me? He but refrained frae taking another man's bride. I could scarce be persuaded to accept my ain."

"True, true," said Bowes, unable to conceal his laughter. "That important difference in the two cases escaped me."

"Weel," said James, what say ye now, Sir Robert? What div ye think of me? We north country folk are a vara suparior people; but ye maun allow that not only in my rank, and in my knowledge, but in my virtues, I am *facile princeps*."

"A Solomon, your Majesty, as all confess—

a very Solomon—greater even than the King of Israel, for I doubt if he would have appeared to advantage, in the character of the younger Scipio; or had the philosophy to prefer an autumn's hunting to the King of Denmark's two handsome daughters."

"I kenned ye wad say sae. But *quid ad rem?* What for hae I told ye a' this? Was it to gratify my vanity? It is a weakness that I hold in utter contempt. Na, na, it was because I wished ye to act *regis ad exemplar;* to tak me for your model, and copy royalty."

"And marry Mary Ker."

"Exactly. Ye are the Ambassador of my near kinswoman, the Queen of England. Ye will, probably, be my ain future subject; and, in either case, it's your duty."

"To marry, that I may relieve your Majesty's necessities."

"Just that."

"Well! eloquence is your Majesty's forte. Since the days of Cicero, you have had no equal, and I fear I must consent."

"That's right. Your conscience will reward ye—but the gear, man, the gear; I hae na' a bodle."

"Ah! There's the difficulty. You spoke of one thousand merks. If I reckon not a few gold pieces in my pocket, I have but three hundred and twenty in Scotland."

"Weel, three hundred and twenty is something to a starving man, so I'll tak that as earnest money, and ye'll gie us a bond for the remainder."

"But Mistress Ker."

"What o' her?"

"Would she consent?"

"Nae doubt o't. She has been brought up in the knowledge of her duties, as a faithfu' subject."

"And the Queen?"

James fidgeted.

"Your Majesty has not done me the honour to answer my question. Would Queen Anne approve of the marriage?"

"*I* hae sanctioned it, and that means that *she* has sanctioned it, for St. Paul says, 'Wives obey your Husbands in all things.'"

"There is a dame in Chaucer," said Bowes, laughing, "that upheld the Apostle to be a sound Divine. But I have heard," added he, in a meaning tone, "that there are ladies in the world, not equally orthodox."

The King seemed to understand the allusion, for he once more thrust his hands into his pennyless pockets, and shuffled twice or thrice round the room.

"Sir Robert," said he, at length, in a confidential tone, "ye ken the lasses. They're kittle cattle to shoe ahint. 'Ane man in a thousand have I found, but ane woman in ten thousand have I not found,' says he, "wha ought to have kenned them weel, considering that he married five or six hundred o' them. Though how he keepit order amid such a clanjamphry, is a maitter, which, wi a' my knowledge and sagacity and a'maist divine perspicuity of intellect, has ever been beyond my comprehension. So ye see," and the King once more looked embarrassed.

"Am I to understand that you doubt if her Majesty will give her consent?"

James said nothing.

"Will you do me the honour to answer me?"

There was still no reply.

"Well, then, as I may assume the silence of your Majesty to warrant my doubts, you will not take it amiss, if I delay my purchase of the Wardship till I have secured the Queen's approbation of my suit."

"But ye'll let me hae, at least, the earnest money?"

"I must reserve that till the conclusion of the contract."

"And hae ye nae gratitude to me, for gieing ye sic a grand heiress?"

"You forget that in this I follow your Majesty's wishes, not my own."

"And hae ye the heart to leave me without a penny?"

"No—my purse is at your service. The twenty angels in it will relieve your present

necessities. But for the moment, I will bid your Majesty adieu. I must to the Queen," and he moved towards the door.

"And mind," said James, as he followed his steps, "that I hae a thousand merks depending on the issue, so dinna tak *no* for an answer; and mind—but it's nae use," muttered he to himself, as he watched Bowes's rapidly disappearing figure, "it's nae use trying to keep up wi' a man wha flits awa' like a bogle. Sae I'll back to my sanctum, and drink to his bon-aillie. But Gude guide us," continued he, as he handled greedily his new wealth, "how thae Southerners fling their gowd about, as if it were sklate stanes. It's my firm belief that the land of Goshen was but an allegory for the kingdom of England; and if, by luck or gude guidance, I ance get my fit on't, I'll play cock on my ain midden, and live like a Pharoah. And I'll be bound they dinna drown me in the Red Sea, or ony where else. I'm no that fond of the water. Ulyie, say the auld philo-

sophers, ulyie is the rael thing for the skin ; and, my certie ! I'll stick to philosophy."

With the words, the King once more sought his private chamber, to play the Esculapius to his sick stag hounds, and nourish his peculiar notions of the dogmas of the schools, by repeated applications to the Duke of Chatelherauts' Canary.

CHAPTER II.

A QUEEN AND HER MAIDENS.

THE private sitting-room of the Queen, to which Bowes was now bending his steps, was situated in the north wing of the palace, and looked upon the court-yard. It is not improbable that to this cause it was indebted for the preference of royalty; for to a young and gay woman, the ever moving throng—the splendidly attired cavaliers—the horses in their velvet housings—the piqueurs with their dogs in leash—the falconers with their hawks on wrist, —the perpetual bustle of arrival or departure—all formed a picture more attractive than forest or lake.

The apartment in question was occupied by three ladies. They were seated round a fire, which the early autumn of a northern climate made already welcome, and were apparently employed in tapestry-work, for their embroidery frames were in their laps, or lay on the ground near them. Two of them were our old acquaintances, Lady Beatrice and Mary Ker ;—the third was the Queen of Scots.

Anne of Denmark was worthy of a better fate. Nature had cast her in its happiest mould. The lofty forehead—the nose slightly arched—the large dark brown eyes, dangerous alike when melting with tenderness, or flashing with anger—the pouting mouth—the short curled upper lip—the tall, graceful and well rounded figure, the neck, the bust, the waist, each faultless, made her beyond comparison the handsomest princess of her time. Nor was the mind inferior to the person. Like most of the women of high rank of the period, she was an admirable linguist ; learned in Latin, not unacquainted with German, intimate with French, and speaking Italian with the same purity and

facility, as the language of her own Northern land. To these accomplishments were to be added quickness of perception, knowledge of character, and felicity of language. Such was the girl, who at sixteen, in all the brilliancy of her young beauty, had been consigned to the arms of the dirtiest specimen of humanity in Christendom.

The marriage, as may be expected, was an unhappy one. The feeble character of James, his slovenly habits, and his drunken orgies, had something to do with the matter; but it was understood, that there were reasons even more calculated to make the union painful to his Royal Consort, than the neglect, or the low debauchery of her husband. It was whispered in the Court circles, that the daughter of Denmark had given her hand without her heart, and there were rumours—vague, no doubt, and unauthenticated, but still widely-spread, that, if her personal feelings had been consulted, she would have been the bride of a young Danish noble.

Whatever were the cause, Anne, as years passed on, became reckless in her conduct. Her gaiety of carriage shocked the Calvinistic

clergy, and formed no unfrequent subject of their denunciations from the pulpit; while the older, and more trustworthy statesmen of James's Court looked with still graver sorrow upon that passion for political intrigue, which in Anne—as in Mary of Medicis, in Henrietta Maria, and Marie Antoinette—was the leading passion of her character, and which, like her royal compeers, she was disposed to gratify, without any reference to the consequences to herself, her husband, or her kingdom.

At the moment we present her to our readers, she was, however, in a more sportive and graceful mood, for, with those she loved, there was nothing to jar upon her feelings, and her better nature had free room to display itself.

"Let us have done, girls," said she in a gay tone, as she flung her embroidery frame upon the floor, "we have had enough of labour for the day. No Penelope could have worked harder."

"It may be so, your Grace," said Mary, "but I could have wished that you had given us a better example of industry."

"Impossible! there is none such."

"Another then—and not a better."

"And why, *ma mie?*"

"Because," said Mary, with her gay laugh, "the example of the Queen of Ithaca, is little encouraging to the hopes of a lone maiden like myself. She wove her web to keep suitors at a distance, and I would snap needle and crack thread, if I thought that my handy-work were to be followed by similar consequences."

"On my life, *bel enfant*—you are perfectly brazen-faced, this morning. But no wonder. It is your visit to the country. Solitude has made you desperate, and you have come back, prepared to sing aloud for the benefit of aspiring bachelors, 'Heigho! for a husband.'"

"Wrong, your Grace, all wrong," said Lady Beatrice. "The country was not solitary; and if Mary had been disposed to resign snood for curch or cap, she need not have returned to Linlithgow."

"How? What?" said the Queen, turning sharp round upon her youngest attendant, and

fixing her keen glance upon the blushing face. "So there is news to tell. You arrived so late last night, that I have had no time to learn the events of your pilgrimage. Tell me who was the cavalier?"

"Beatrice," said Mary, with a beseeching glance, and a raised finger. "Be silent. You know you promised."

"Ah! she is sworn to secrecy, is she? Then there really is something to tell. How delightful! So out with it, Beatrice, out with it."

"But, madam, I am under a vow."

"And refuse to answer. Why, it's rank treason. Wouldst thou be contumacious, girl? Wouldst thou rebel? Must I summon thee before the parliament? Or surrender thee to the *peine forte et dure* of the black-gowned inquisitors of the Kirk?"

"Mercy," said Beatrice, laughing, "I pray you, mercy. You are my dread sovereign, and, if you order me to answer on my allegiance—I must obey."

"I do. I insist, I ordain, I command.

Speak. Enumerate place and circumstance. Name the plotters and the result."

"Well then. Royal lady—being thus compelled, I must declare the truth. Mary had a lover."

"How charming! I guessed as much. Well, who was it? What did he say? What did he do?"

"I answer your Majesty, categorically. The 'who,' was the Lord Warden. He said, 'Mary, will you marry me?' And he went away, when she replied—'No.'"

"Oh! most lame and impotent conclusion! Had I been Dame Venus, I should have passed an edict for expunging that word 'no,' from the dictionary. But why was it said? Why was it spoken?"

"In that, I must refer your Grace to the speaker."

"Well, mistress, your exquisite reason I pray?"

"I will answer your Grace, in the words of the amusing vagabond you quoted just now—Will Shakespeare—he, whose mummeries

charmed you so last Pentecost. 'I have no exquisite reason, but I have reason good enough.'"

"And what is it? Shape it into language, girl. Tell me at once."

Mary was silent.

"What, no answer? If the fellow gained not your lips, he seems, at least, to have stolen your tongue. What was your objection to him? He is very handsome!"

"I told her so," said Beatrice.

"Dances like Mountjoy, or Sir Christopher."

"Your Majesty is right. My very words."

"Dresses better than the Spanish Ambassador, who has his falling ruffs from Mechlin, and his velvet from Genoa."

"Then the Warden wears his gloves scented."

"And has a diamond in his bonnet worth a king's ransom."

"And his French! your Grace, marked you his French?"

"His French! pshaw! have you noted his boots?"

"The leather of the best yellow Cordovan."

"The tops lined with velvet, the edges trimmed with lace. Why girl," continued the Queen, almost breathless from the energy of her enumeration, "the man is perfect."

"Not exactly," said Beatrice, in a dry tone. "In my friend Mary's eyes, he has one great defect."

"What is it?"

"Guess."

"His hair is brown. It should have been black."

Beatrice shook her head.

"His eyes are hazel—they might have been blue."

Once more, Lady Beatrice intimated her dissent.

"He wears his moustache trimmed, and his chin à l'Espagnole, while he should have been like an old goat, or the English Ambassador, bearded from ear to ear."

"Wrong again; but your Grace must be in league with the Evil One, for your words seem to have called up the dying or the

dead. There, is the very man you spoke of."

"What? Sir Robert Bowes! Impossible, he is a-bed, sick, in Edinburgh."

"Then it must be his ghost; and for a disembodied spirit, lively enough, for his port is erect, and his step firm. He is going towards the King's apartments."

"Go where he may," said Anne, in tones of great disgust, "I detest him. But *revenons à nos moutons.* What has a fellow like that in common with such a Squire of Dames as the Lord Warden."

"It is precisely" replied Lady Beatrice, "because the Lord Warden has nothing in common with a fellow like that, that he is not likely to be the Squire of Dames—at least to our friend Mary."

"And why?"

"Ah! your Grace, have you not discovered?"

"What?"

"That Mary is ambitious."

"Well, Buccleugh is rich; she may buy half the jewellery in George Heriot's shop."

"It is scarce credible—but she has no passion for jewellery."

"Well, if she love to play the Grande Dame in the country, she can sit in the chamber of Dais at Branksome, the little queen of a subject court—the admired of knights and vassals, and with no want of a sirloin on the table, so long as there is a fat bullock north of Tyne."

"She cares nothing for knights or vassals, and is but a small eater of beef."

"Nay then—I give it up. The Sphynx herself could not read the riddle—what wants she?"

"Why, that her lover had something of the qualities of the man you detest so much."

"Of Sir Robert Bowes?"

"Of Sir Robert Bowes."

"The girl's mad. Why he's old; he's ugly; he can't dance."

"Yes. But he is ambitious. He would rule kings and courts and kingdoms; and that little person by your side, who looks so meek and modest, and is now, apparently, employed heart and soul in sewing on a yellow tail to a red dragon, shares his aspirations."

"Is it so, indeed!" said Anne of Denmark, drawing a long breath, "can this be true, Mary?"

There was no answer.

"Has the girl, indeed," said the Queen, once more addressing herself to Lady Beatrice, "a mind above ribands and laces, and brewing simples, and superintending venison pasties! Has she spirit and strength of will enough for a great enterprise? Might she be trusted?" And the eyes of the royal dame fixed themselves keenly and significantly on her companion.

Beatrice's eyebrows lowered, her lips compressed themselves, and a gentle shake of the head intimated dissent.

For an instant, the Queen looked displeased, and a shade of care passed across her expressive features. It was but for a moment, however. The cloud disappeared, and the landscape became brilliant as before.

"And what say you to this, Mary?" continued she, turning to the young girl, who was still deep in the mysteries of her tent stitch. Is, I repeat, all this true?"

"May I ask to what your Majesty alludes?

"Why, to all that Beatrice Ruthven has, for the last half hour, been pouring into my ears."

"Does your Majesty speak of the Lord Warden?"

"Yes."

"It is true."

"You have refused him?"

"I have."

"And for what reason?"

"Much for the reason that Lady Beatrice has assigned for it. He possesses a thousand good qualities; qualities," continued she, with a slight smile, "even more important to the happiness of a woman's life, than his dancing, his French, or the colour of his boots, but yet—

"Yet one was wanting."

"Yes, your Majesty is right, one was wanting. A woman who marries, should do more than love her husband, she should respect him. Nay, dearest lady," continued she, hurriedly, as the tears started to the Queen's eyes. "I meant not to pain you. I meant not to offend. But you asked me for the reasons of my refusal, and I gave them."

"You have pained me not, love. You offend me not," said the Queen in a low tone, as she leant over the side of the chair, and touched with her lips the young girl's cheek. "My lot in life is fixed, and nothing now can either mar or make it. But your's is still in the bud, and I'd fain hear what are your dreams of happiness? May they prove more real than have been my own."

There was a pause for a minute. Notwithstanding the Queen's affectation of indifference, tear after tear coursed rapidly down her cheek, till, at length, unable to struggle longer against the recollections of the past, she sank back in her chair, and abandoned herself to memories. As for her companions, they leant over their tapestry, and in silent sympathy, awaited the termination of the royal burst of sorrow.

Anne spoke, at length, though her manner was still agitated, and her voice low.

"Yes, my child, I remember my own day-dreams, and I have sometimes wished that I had indulged them less. Are you not following my example?—sacrificing a reality for a

shadow; and acting unwisely in refusing a young man, of whom the world's voice speaks so highly, merely because he is not the Paladin your romance has conjured up for you?"

"I am, perhaps, not so romantic as your Grace believes me, though I confess that the possession of the material advantages you spoke of, would not suffice for my happiness. You say the Lord Warden is rich, handsome, noble. It is all true, and these qualities might perchance, produce affection; but something more than affection is necessary for happiness, and that is sympathy."

"And why should it not exist here."

"Because Buccleugh's tastes and mine are different. He is contented with his lot."

"The first of Virtues!"

"Will your Grace pardon me, if I say the worst of vices! for it limits a man's efforts, and paralyses his intellects. The Lord Warden is a gallant cavalier; but his contentment will prevent him exhibiting his gallantry. He has great talents given him; but his wealth has made their exercise unnecessary, and he will not

exercise them. No, he will live and die in his native glens, the best of landlords, the kindest of masters; but beyond these glens his name be unknown."

"And where could his time be better spent? Is not the care of them a duty?"

"True! but love requires admiration as well as respect. The ant labours in the summer, to store its winter food, and we respect its labours; but we would not wish to change places with the ant; we do not wish to live with it; simply because its world is so small, that the result of its best exertions must, in spite of ourselves, appear to our eyes insignificant."

"Why, you are mad, girl. What would you have? Answer me that."

"First, I pray of you, answer me this. Did you ever read Plutarch?

"Often."

"Well then, you can understand my feelings, as I am certain they are your own. I never open his volumes, but my eye sparkles, and my cheek flushes, as I read of the thoughts, or the acts of his great men. Years have passed since

I first looked upon his pages, but I feel now as I felt then, that it was only a man, such as he describes men, that I could sympathize with, or could love ;—one who could not only originate great thoughts, but do great acts ;—one who, instead of limiting his exertions to the petty boundaries of some feudal Lordship, could stand forth a distinguished actor on the great stage of life, with the giants of the earth for his fellow mimes, and a world for his theatre."

Under the excitement of her feelings, Mary had unconsciously risen from her chair, and as she stood before her companions with crimsoned cheek, and flashing eye, she looked the impersonation of some priestess of the Oracles of old Greece, in the moment of inspiration.

"Bravo, girl!" said the Queen, laughing, "You mouth it in the Hercles' vein. Old Tarleton himself could not have done it better. By the halidome, Beatrice, the young Merle Falcon flies a bold flight. We must match her with something better than her breed. Nothing but some eagle of the south, whose

eye can shame the sun, will do to mate her with."

"Your Grace is right. I know none, but our little friend who crossed the court-yard lately, Magnifico enough to content her fancy."

"What, Sir Robert Bowes!" said the Queen, laughing. "You are a mad girl."

"Nay, I said it in sober sadness. It is whispered," continued she, and in a tone which left no doubt of the sincerity of her language, "that his ambition is as unmeasured as her own. I have it from a sure source, and one that your Majesty wots of," and she looked significantly at her companion, "that he has plans on foot for supplanting the Cecils, and forcing on Queen Bess his government."

"Ha! say you so, indeed," whispered the Queen, anxiously. Why told you not me of this before? I held him ever too inveterate a grumbler, to suppose that his discontent would expand into action. But who comes here?" continued she, as the door opened, and a tall thin man, with a white rod in his hand, entered

the chamber. "Bernard Lindsay, as I live. Well, what wants my gentleman usher?"

"The Ambassador of England, your Highness, craves an audience."

The Queen turned round to her companions, and all three burst into a scream of laughter.

"The hand of fate is in the matter," said Anne in a low voice. "It cannot be otherwise. Nothing but fate could have sent him at such a moment. Well, if he asks me not for Mary, I shall certainly propose Mary to him. But be off with you girls. This may be an important conference, and must be a private one. And now, Bernard," continued she, as she watched the retreating figures of her maidens, "you may return to him that sent you, and tell Sir Robert, that we permit him to enter."

With the words she resumed her seat on the fauteuil, and drawing herself up to her full height, awaited, with the port and bearing of a Queen, the Ambassador of England.

CHAPTER III.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

Bowes entered the room; but few would have recognised in him the individual, who, but a few minutes before, had been the companion of the King. With James, he was by turns, frank, jovial, careless—but the distance which separated the apartments of the royal consorts, short as it was, had sufficed to change the manners and the man. No longer familiar, pedantic, or indifferent, he approached Anne of Denmark with an air of profound respect, and with three different obeisances, each graceful enough to

have done credit to a Leicester, or an Essex.

"Good morning to you, Sir Robert," said the Queen, with a smile, "you have asked of us an audience, and I am never more happy than when I am able to gratify the wishes of the representative of my good sister of England. Have ye aught of message for me, from her?"

"No madam."

"Nor letter?"

"Nor letter, madam."

"What matter political, then, have you got for my private ear?"

"Madam, I know my duty to your Majesty too well to intrude upon you such distasteful subjects. My object is a more selfish one. I have been ill, and I but craved an audience, for the purpose of recalling so insignificant a person as myself to the memory of the Queen of Scots."

"My memory, Sir Robert," said Anne, with one of those smiles which became her so well, "is not so treacherous as you deem it.

But let that pass. Most happy am I to see you once more convalescent. The health of so distinguished a diplomatist as Sir Robert Bowes, is a matter of importance to all who take an interest in the world's welfare."

"Alas! Madam, the happiness of humanity depends not on its collective wisdom, but on its social pleasures; and in these, it is your sex that is pre-eminent, and not mine."

"You speak a compliment, Sir Ambassador, but you intend a sarcasm. You award us supremacy—but only in trifles. And you are right. The greater talents of our race, the gifts of mind, you men have kept to yourselves—and with them, you have monopolised the power."

"No, madam, for if we rule the world, you rule us."

"It is, at the best, but a reflected influence."

"It is not the less a pleasurable one."

"You are wrong. To a woman really possessing intelligence, it is, to the last degree, mortifying. Power is charming. I confess

it. But how much does it take from the delight of its possession, when one recollects that it has been obtained by a success in the galliard, or the evolutions of a peacock's feather fan."

"Why madam, what would you have? You are a woman."

"It is that which I complain of. I *am* a woman. Would I were a man. Would that I possessed authority, influence, power, by the direct agency of my own energies, instead of being compelled to obtain them by using the blandishments of our sex, as a means of appealing to the weaknesses of yours."

"Yet there are such women as your Majesty speaks of—women who do possess such influence, and by such direct means. My gracious mistress for example."

"Ah! she is a Queen."

"Why, so is your Majesty,"

"No, a monarch's wife indeed, but a neglected one. Ah! were I as she is, obeyed, feared, worshipped;—that would be a life worth living for."

"And why should yours not be so?"

"Do you ask? Have you forgotten—why should I mince the phrase?—the mate that heaven has blessed me with?"

"Madam, I have forgotten nothing."

"Then why insult me, by mocking me with hints of power beyond my reach."

"Madam, it is not so. I speak not of his Majesty; it becomes me not. But were his weaknesses multiplied ten fold, he would not be a feebler thing than Odenatus or Ninus."

"And they were?"

"The husbands of women like yourself, breathing energy and intelligence and ambition —of Zenobia and Semiramis."

"Ah!"

"They, too, like your Majesty, creatures of a divine essence, were linked to a child of clay. But did their silken bonds trammel their iron will? No, Madam. They felt that heaven had destined them to wear alone a crown," and his voice sank to a whisper, as he added, "and *alone* they wore it."

There must have been something in the words, more than met the ear, for the Queen trembled as she listened, her face became deadly pale, and she grasped convulsively the arms of her chair.

"It may be so," said she, at length, in a timid voice; "as you allege the fact, I suppose it was so; but with your permission, we will discontinue the discussion. The subject is a painful one. The idea is new to me."

"No Madam," said Bowes, as he fixed his keen eye on his companion, "the idea is *not* new to you. A little bird has whispered in my ear, that not twelve months by-gone, an attempt was made to gain possession of the person of Prince Henry. Did your Majesty," continued he, in a tone of bitter irony, "ever hear of such a project?"

"I—I," muttered the conscience-stricken Queen, "wished to superintend, personally, the education of my child. Lord Mar was cruel to him."

"An effort was, at the same time, made to seize the Castle of Stirling. Did your

nursery, Madam, require an impregnable fortress and powerful artillery?"

"It was a mistake," muttered Anne, "my orders were misconstrued."

"If it was a mistake, Madam, the arrangements of the plot seemed indifferently well laid. That it was misconstrued, is true; yet permit me to add, that the misconstruction was natural; for the wisest counsellers of his Majesty recollected that the possession of the heir of the crown, by one, not the wearer of the crown, had cost James III. his life, and consigned Queen Mary to a prison."

The Queen seemed profoundly agitated, and changed repeatedly her place in her chair, as if uncertain what to say or do. Suddenly, however, the colour returned to her cheek, and the fire to her eye, and drawing herself up to her full height, she confronted her accuser.

"Sir Robert Bowes," said she, in a calm haughty tone, "you are evidently too well acquainted with the matters you speak of, for me to endeavour to controvert them. But the folly is passed. My husband has pardoned it,

and as he was the only person interested, he is the only one who has a right to animadvert upon my conduct. As for you, Sir, you have chosen to intrude upon my notice, affairs of state beyond your sphere, and you will not be surprised if I close this interview. You will be still less astonished if I decline the honour of your visits for the future."

"Madam, I comprehend you not."

"Ha! ha! ha!" said the Queen, with an insulting laugh, for her confidence, and her courage had returned. "Methinks for one so shrewd as the Ambassador of England, the lesson is a simple one. You fancied me in your toils, because you believed my husband ignorant of the plot. Be undeceived. You are weak, powerless, for he knows all."

The two looked at each other. Eye met eye —glance, glance, but neither quailed. Around the Queen's mouth, as her spirits rose with their trial, played the smile of mockery.

"No, Madam," said Bowes, at length, "your Majesty misunderstood me. You spoke of the past. I alluded to the future. The King does

not know all. Have you heard of late from Padua?"

The question was a simple one, but it seemed to exercise upon Anne of Denmark a magic influence, for her face became instantly as pale as death, and she once more leant forward in her chair, — the lips open — the breathing short and hurried; with straining eyes fixed upon her companion.

Bowes affected not to remark her agitation, though there was something like a smile about his mouth; and in the same quiet tone as before, he repeated. "Madam, I would again ask, have you heard of late from Padua?"

The words appeared to recall the Queen from her momentary trance, for in a tremulous voice, but with assumed indifference, she replied:

"No, no, no. Why should I hear from Padua? I have no correspondents there. Wherefore ask ye the question?"

"It was dictated, by a feeling of anxiety for the interests of your Majesty. Some three months since, a packet, addressed to the Queen of Scots by Lord Gowrie, was lost on the road.

May I venture to enquire, if later couriers have been more trustworthy ?"

"What! the packet!—the lost packet!" said the Queen, in a half scream. "Do you know of it ?"

"Yes, Madam—and of its contents."

For a minute, it seemed as if Anne were unable to comprehend the answer. All at once, her fingers tightened in their grasp, limb and feature grew rigid, and she gazed at her companion with a fixed, stolid look, as if his words had arrested the current of her blood, and changed her into stone.

Bowes stirred not—but with his clear, cold eye, watched his victim. By degrees her stupor passed away. Gradually, too, the colour retinted her cheek, and an involuntary motion of the limbs marked returning vitality. The Queen spoke, at length; but in a low tone, and with her eyes fixed upon the ground.

"And you know all, then."

"All—every act of the future plot;—the proposed hunting party—the intended seizure of the King—the imprisonment in Fast Castle—

the coronation of the infant heir—the Regency—I ought to say the Reign of your Majesty."

"And is any one but yourself acquainted with these facts?"

"*Here*, Madam," replied he, with a strong emphasis upon the word, Here, "none. And I have received instructions to use my own discretion, as to whether it shall be communicated to King James—or not."

"Is that the truth, Sir Robert?"

"The whole truth, Madam; and I speak to you, not as the Ambassador of England, but as a gentleman. I answer you, on my honour."

"Then why should you tell him? You will not be so cruel as to tell my husband. Ah! Sir Robert, what have I done, that you should be my enemy?"

"You are in error, Madam. I am not your enemy."

"But you know this frightful secret."

"It is not the possession of knowledge, but the using it for evil, that makes hostility."

"Then you will not ruin me?"

"On the contrary, Madam, no one is more anxious than I am, to support your interests."

"I comprehend you not," said she, with a faint smile. "Like the priests of the Oracles of old, you must explain your own mysteries."

"Madam," said he, as he took a chair by her side, "a few words will be sufficient to resolve them. You would rule this kingdom."

The Queen looked at him with a glance, in which present terror was strangely mixed with habitual coquetry. There was, however, in the expression of her companion, something that seemed to induce confidence, for it was in a frank, firm tone that she answered.

"Would I rule this kingdom, do you ask? After the discoveries you have made, Sir Robert, the question is unnecessary."

"I repeat it, nevertheless."

The Queen nodded.

"Rule it—fully—absolutely—without the interference of drunken king—factious nobles—or insolent clergy."

The Queen nodded again.

"Yet, Margaret Tudor tried this, and failed."

"True."

"Mary of Guise tried this, and failed."

"True also."

"Mary Stuart tried this, and she failed likewise."

"It cannot be denied."

"Did it ever occur to your Majesty, why?"

"No, to me it has ever been a mystery."

"Hear it explained then. The nobles of Scotland are as powerful as the Sovereign, and the three Queens failed in establishing their authority, because they associated with themselves in power—they made their favourite, their Minister—one of these nobles."

"The fact is certain, but what is your deduction from it?"

"The elevation of the individual excited the jealousy of his fellow Barons; and to pull down an equal, made superior to themselves, they did not hesitate to destroy the crown that supported him."

"But how was this to be avoided?"

"By entrusting the management of their affairs

to one, who, unconnected alike with the family alliances of the great feudatories, or their private quarrels, would have been able to give disinterested advice to the Sovereign who employed him."

"And where, in this most clannish of kingdoms, was such a man to be found? Why, not within its limits."

"Then seek him beyond them. Yes, Madam," continued Bowes, as he marked the surprise in the Queen's face. "I repeat my words, seek him beyond them. What your predecessors needed, what you need, is a stranger for a counsellor; a native of some foreign land—one, noble, yet of rank not too lofty — of wealth, sufficient to give him independance, yet not great enough to produce envy—one in short——"

"Like yourself," said the Queen with a smile.

"Yes—like myself. Your Majesty's intuitive sagacity will now perceive why I revealed not the secrets of Padua—and why I wish to be your friend."

"Because your own interests require it?"

"Exactly. I acknowledge the fact—and it is the best evidence of my sincerity. Your Majesty wishes to be ruler of this kingdom. I trust to see you not only that—but," continued he, in a half whisper, "of another, and a mightier one. And I hope this—because here and elsewhere, I would be your minister."

"And where," said the Queen, with a flushed cheek, and sparkling eye, "where could I find a better? What bolder hand is there; what wiser head than that of Sir Robert Bowes? I accept your proffered services, and I promise you the reward you seek for them. Our coalition—our union, will make us invincible. Why should we delay its completion?"

"You forget, Madam," said Bowes coldly, "that the path to power is not strewed with roses. You have yourself learned its dangers. So may I. Were Cecil to have an inkling of what has passed between your Majesty and myself, a short shrift, and a sharp axe, would be the end of it."

"And can nothing be done to avert the peril?"

"Nothing to avert, but much to compensate for it. I must have a refuge here—some Barony—which, however paltry in its size, would be sufficient to enable me—in case the hump-back's beagles should scent the matter—to claim Scotland as my new country, and give me a new home."

"There are many such to be bought."

"Such a thing as a purchase, Madam, is impossible. It would but attract notice, and excite suspicion."

"And such a *pied-à-terre* is absolutely necessary?"

"Absolutely."

"Nay then, I am at my wit's end, unless you woo some of our north country damsels, with a dozen miles of moss and moor pinned to her girdle."

"Your Majesty forgets that I am but lately a widower."

"The higher the compliment to my old

friend, Lady Bowes—to prove, by a second marriage, that the virtues of a wife made matrimony indispensable."

"It is a sacrifice, Madam, but I will not conceal from you, that ambition has been my day-dream since boyhood, and I would sacrifice much, to assure your greatness and my own."

"I am grateful—I will be grateful; but in sober earnest, as to the lady."

"That is a point upon which your Majesty's judgment must be better than mine."

"I suppose," said the Queen, laughing, "you insist upon beauty."

"If a man is to commit a folly, he should have fair reasons for excusing it."

"Well, let me see—there is the Laird of Dundrum. He has one fair daughter, and no more. What say you to rich corn lands, and fat beeves in our kingdom of Fife?"

Bowes shook his head.

"Nay, if you prefer the romantic to the useful, I can suit you there too. Saw you not here on the eve of St. John, the dark eyed

Flora Macalister. She has pine forests, and crystal lakes, and interminable hunting grounds, and a pedigree, which goes beyond the flood; not to speak of a hundred red shanked gillies, as a body guard."

Once more Bowes intimated dissent.

"Nay, I give it up in despair then. In what do they displease you?"

"Madam, the damsels may be as rich as Crœsus, and beautiful as Venus, or your Majesty; but a union with either is impossible."

'And why, I pray?"

"Because to communicate frequently with your minister is necessary to your interests."

"Undoubtedly."

"Yet such communication, if avowed, would suggest jealousy, or discontent."

"Beyond a question."

"If then, I were to have the honour of being at the head of your Majesty's government, I would suggest, that my future wife should be the medium of our intelligence, and to enable her to play her part without suspicion, it would

be well that she should be attached to your person ; or better still, should even now—but such a piece of good fortune is impossible—have the right of access to your chamber, and your ear."

"Admirable!" said the Queen. "In very truth, admirable. My Solomon of a husband, if he knew the plan, would have pronounced it worthy of Achitophel. But where are we to find the lady? Ha!" said Anne, clasping her hands with delight. "I know the very person who will suit us. She is a great admirer of yours. We were speaking of you this morning. It is one of my maidens, Mistress Mary Ker."

Bowes' eye sparkled for a moment, but in another, everything was cold and calm, and with his hands clasped, and his look fixed upon the floor, he remained for a while silent, as if he were considering the Queen's proposal.

"Madam," said he, at length, "the enterprise to which you have invited me, if it be a great, is a dangerous one—for life and fortune are on the cards ; and I will peril neither lightly. As regarding this Mistress Mary Ker, I have heard much

speech of her, and to her honour. She has wit, and power of will; and both are necessary to the success of the Queen of Scots. Her brother, too, is powerful on the Border; and the Castle of Cessford is within a day's ride of Streatlam, and if evil fortune comes," added he, with a significant nod, "their neighbourhood may be useful. With Mistress Ker, then, I will encounter the risk you offer me. And within a year of our nuptials, I will guarantee that you shall be mistress of Scotland, and assured of the greater kingdom."

The Queen's cheek flushed, and her bosom swelled, as she listened to the prediction of her future honours.

"Ah! if it were but true," said she. "If I were certain of it. Will you not fail me?"

"Madam, will *you* not fail *me?* The lady you speak of is young, and may wish a younger suitor."

"No, no," said Anne, in the enthusiasm of her own selfishness, altogether forgetful of the possible disinclination of her protégée. "She will not oppose my wishes—she cannot—she

dare not. She is the King's ward, and must marry whom he will. So have no fears on that head, Sir Robert. I promise you Mary's hand. You may depend upon me."

"And you, Madam, in that event, may depend upon me also. But I will be frank with you. This is a matter on which I have entered against my will, but being in, I hold with the text, 'let not him that putteth his hand to the plough, draw it back.' And the constancy I give, I expect. Your Majesty has a noble nature, but, pardon me for saying that Queens are proverbially fickle. I caution you against the indulgence of the weakness, for it might be dangerous. It was the fickleness of Mary, that led her to Loch Leven, and the prisons of royalty have been, for the most part, the heralds of its grave."

He looked at the Queen long and calmly; and then added, in his usually unimpassioned tone. "This afternoon, I will recommend myself to the good wishes of Mistress Mary Ker."

He bowed low as he spoke. In another instant, the Queen was alone, but still she

bent forward, still her eyes gazed at the door, as if, though unseen, she would have followed his retreating footsteps.

"His voice was courteous," said she to herself; "but methinks there sounded something like menace in his language. The dungeons of Loch Leven! Why need he have mentioned them to me? Am I, in case I fail him, destined to be their occupant. Heaven help me! I sought the aid of an associate, and, I fear, I have found a master."

CHAPTER IV.

WOOING BY PROXY.

SOME minutes had elapsed since Bowes had left the room, and yet the Queen stirred not. But the tears, which at intervals forced their way between the fair fingers, and the occasional convulsive sob, bore evidence to her agitation and her fears. All at once, however, her bold spirit seemed to recover itself, for with a hasty movement of the fingers, she brushed the tears from her cheek, and resumed her upright position.

"This is idle," said she to herself. "This is unwomanly. It is worse—it is unwise. If there be danger, I must meet it as becomes a

daughter of Denmark. And yet it may be, that I have conjured up phantoms without a cause, If Beatrice spoke not in jest of that young girl's ambition, all may yet be well. But I will learn the truth, and that instantly."

She touched, as she spoke, a silver hand-bell on the table. Its summons was instantly answered by the white-wanded domestic.

"Bernard Lindsay," said the Queen, "let Mistress Ker know that I would speak with her."

She was not kept long waiting, and in a few minutes, Mary entered the room.

"Well, love," said her mistress, speaking in a tone of joyous badinage, little in accordance with her real feelings, "my audience is over, and the great man is gone. Verily a wonderful person is that Sir Robert Bowes."

"Apparently your Majesty is pleased with him. I had fancied that you looked not on him with the eye of favour."

"Nor did I. I have never disputed his talents. They are too universally recognised, to need the evidence of my eulogy. But

it was their very greatness that awoke my disapprobation."

"You astonish me. I thought your Highness had ever been an admirer of wit, in those who possessed it."

"You are right; and the fault is mine, that I do not express myself more intelligibly. It was not the superiority of the Ambassador of Elizabeth which irritated me; it was his too evident consciousness of it. He ever seemed to envelope himself in a world of his own, and to hold aloof from the follies, the weaknesses, the sympathies of his fellow-men, as if he and they were not of the same nature."

"He held himself, in short," said Mary, laughing, "as too divine for humanity."

"Precisely."

"And you have discovered this demi-god to be like his fellow mortals, made of common clay."

"Yes, girl," said the Queen, as her high spirits returned to her, and her eyes once more sparkled with their usual vivacity. "The invincible Achilles was vulnerable in the heel,

and this over sapient friend of ours has, I have learned, a hole in his armour of proof."

"And being sillier, you like him better? Is that the notable conclusion your Majesty has arrived at?"

"If it were so, it would be no uncommon one; but your words are ill-chosen. You spoke of folly. I spoke of weakness."

"I confess, your Grace, I see not the difference."

"The latter is but a defect of the judgment: the former of the heart."

"A narrow distinction."

"A broad one. A folly in its origin, must be a vice. A weakness may be a virtue."

"And you have ascertained beyond question, this hitherto unknown excellence in the English Ambassador. May I ask what it is? for surely a quality distinguished enough to command the admiration of the Queen of Scots, deserves to be noted in my tablets. What is its designation?"

"Love."

"Love! not possible," said Mary, with a

burst of laughter. "The grave, the formal, the cold, Sir Robert Bowes, a victim of the blind God! By St. Winifred—Dan Cupid never made a nobler conquest. But who is to wear the honours of the victory? What is the name of the fair lady?"

"Mary Ker."

"Who, did you say?" almost screamed Mary in astonishment.

"Mary Ker."

"I—?"

"You—"

"It is impossible," was the grave reply. "Your Grace must be in error. Your ears have deceived you."

"My ears deceived me not. He hangs on your looks, lives on your smile, and is ready to die at your feet."

"How absurd!" said Mary, and she broke forth into a long burst of merriment. "And to what," continued she, after a pause, "am I to attribute the present communication? Does he, through the medium of your Majesty,

place rank, and lands, and fortune at my feet?"

"No, that is a matter which he intends to do personally."

"And he consulted your Majesty, I presume, as to his chances of success?"

"He did."

"And what said your Grace of the eligibility of the match?"

"That it was one which, in the highest degree, met my approbation."

"Madam!" said Mary, in accents of supreme astonishment.

"Well, child?"

"My ears must have deceived me. I cannot have heard your Grace aright."

"Your ears deceived you not. I say to you what I said to him, that I thought, and think, the match a fitting one."

"You are not serious, Madam?"

"I never was more so. Nay, child," continued she, as the tears came into Mary's eyes, "do not weep. You are a woman, a sensible,

clear-headed woman. Away, then, with such weaknesses, and let us discuss the matter as friends should discuss serious matters, without passion, and without precipitancy. What is your objection to him?"

"Madam, he is old."

"He is not in his first youth; but youth in a husband is not in itself sufficient to command preference. The Lord Warden is young, and you rejected him."

"But—"

"But what?"

"The Lord Warden was—" and again the fair speaker hesitated, as if unable to find language.

"Well," said the Queen, pettishly, "what was the Lord Warden? You answer me not; then I will answer for you. The Lord Warden was young, handsome, brave, rich, of high blood, of unstained honour. Is not all this true?"

A slight inclination of the head spoke assent.

"And you refused him. Why?"

There was no answer.

"Speak, girl, I say, and at once. You refused him, I repeat, and must have had a reason for that refusal. What was the blot in mind or person, which made his youth, his rank, his wealth, in your eyes as nothing?"

There was still no reply.

"What, still silent!" said the Queen, as her eye flashed, and her cheek crimsoned with passion. "Do you forget what I am, and who you are? You refused this young man. Was it merely out of some girlish pique, or to gratify that miserable feeling, that sometimes disgraces our sex, to have the pleasure of giving pain."

"Oh, no, Madam," said Mary, clasping her hands, as if to give authenticity to her statement. "I had a better and a nobler motive."

"Ah! we are like to arrive at the truth, at last. What was it?"

"Lady Beatrice," said Mary, timidly, "has already hinted it to your Grace."

"If she has, I have forgotten it. At

least, I would rather hear it from your own lips than hers. Again, I ask, what was this noble motive you speak of?"

"I feared, Madam, that I could not be happy as his wife."

"Why—why, I say?" said the Queen, in a tone of intense irritation. "Must I ask the question a thousand times?"

"Madam," said Mary, in a firm tone, "it was because I could not respect him. The Lord Warden has many excellent qualities, but the virtues of the peasant may be the vices of the noble; and the easy temper, the contentment with trifles, the good-natured indolence, which may be sufficient for happiness in middle life, are not the qualities which should distinguish the high-born head of a great name."

"In a word, you held him not to be ambitious. You believed that he would sleep away life in the Castle of Branksome. You thought that his days would pass unhonoured, and his acts unmarked on the page of history, and you disdained to unite yourself with one who, whatever his wealth, or birth, was destined

to die as he had lived, a mere provincial noble. Is it not so, girl? Were not these the reasons for which you refused him? Speak!"

"Madam, they were."

"And now," said the Queen, with a scornful laugh, "listen to me well, and mark your consistency." And Anne spoke slowly, and coldly, as if she wished her companion to weigh each syllable. "You rejected this young man, because he was like to go down a mere bubble on the tide of time, unknown and unremembered—without record of wise thought, or daring act to blazon his memory; and now, when I offer you one who possesses these qualities which you value, and value justly; one with high position, and great wealth, and a world-wide reputation; one on whom kings depend for their thrones, and nations for their welfare; one, in short, who fulfils every condition of that sphere of greatness that has dazzled your imagination, and peopled your dreams—you think fit to reject him also, and for no other end, but to gratify now, as you gratified before, the vagaries of a wayward girl."

"Alas! Madam, what can I say? The heart—"

"Profane not the word. Have the honesty, at least, to call a whim by its proper designation. Yet, if you are disposed to condescend to this trifling, I, for one, will not follow your example. Father and mother you have none to force on you a proper attention to your interests; but I, your mistress and your sovereign, possess their rights, and will exercise their power. You are a Crown Ward, Mistress Ker; and your hand must be given to any one on whom the King and myself think fit to bestow it. When the Princess Mary Tudor was but sixteen, her brother, King Henry, was proud to wed her to Louis XII, of France, a man of threescore and ten; and the world praised the wisdom, and the affection of her royal kinsman. My husband will, in this matter, follow the example of his ancestor, and assure you, in your degree, a position equally distinguished. You shall be the bride of the Ambassador of England."

"Oh no, Madam!" said Mary, falling on her knees, and clasping the Queen's hand, with the tears streaming down her cheeks. "You are not really in earnest? You say it but to terrify me."

Anne seemed under the influence of some internal emotion; but if the kindlier sympathies of the heart made themselves felt, it was only for a moment; and in a measured chilling tone, she said,

"Have done with this folly. For the last time, I announce my will. See that it be obeyed, and in silence. You shall be the bride of the Ambassador of England."

The poor girl remained for some time stupefied, as if unable to comprehend the meaning of the words, and then, as the truth slowly dawned on her, she gazed wildly at the Queen, as if she would have read in her look, something in contradiction to her language. Alas! the cold eye—the compressed mouth—the rigid form, spoke no sympathy.

The expression of Anne of Denmark's face

might have appalled a stouter heart; but despair feels no fear, and Mary once more grasped the Queen's hand.

"No, Madam," said she, as she clung to her mistress, and in spite of the efforts to withdraw them, retained the unwilling fingers. "You shake me not off. You repulse me not. I will grow to your side, I will not quit this spot till I have won you to compassion. Ah, Madam! this must have been the King's doing. The thought, the cruel thought, could have come from him only. Oh! speak to him then, and I will bless you; a thousand times bless you, for saving me from a fate like this."

The Queen moved uneasily in her chair.

"You speak," continued Mary, (as from moment, to moment, the sobs permitted utterance) "of the distinctions of the marriage. Have the distinctions of *your* marriage conferred happiness? You too, Madam, it is whispered, were wedded to one whom you loved not—merely for his high position; but have wealth, and rank, and power, compensated you for the affections you sacrificed as their price? No, no, the tears you

daily shed, bear witness to the misery of such a union. Would you condemn me to it? My generous, my kind-hearted mistress, you would not be so cruel."

Anne seemed violently agitated. Twice or thrice, the teeth compressed themselves, as if in an effort at resolution, but suddenly, her better nature prevailed, her tears burst forth, and flinging her arms wildly around the young girl's neck, she clasped her to her bosom, exclaiming, "You are right, my child. It shall be as you wish. You shall not marry this man. They may take me to Loch Leven. They may consign me to a dungeon, or a scaffold if they will. I care not; I will not break your young heart, even if life itself be the price of its ransom," and once more straining Mary in her arms, she burst into a fresh torrent of tears.

Suddenly, the door opened, and the venerable gentleman usher entered the room. His appearance instantly restored the Queen's self-possession, and allowing Mary to sink upon the floor, she drew herself upright in her chair, and with flashing eye, said:

"What insolence is this, Master Lindsay? And how dare you enter here without permission. Do you wish that your ears should make acquaintance with the Provost Marshal's knife, that you thus forget yourself?"

"Madam," stammered forth the terrified attendant, "I had rapped twice, and I fancied that your Majesty bade me enter."

"Well, sirrah, recollect that they who would keep their tongues safe, must keep them silent. And now, what want you?"

"The English Ambassador, Madam;—he seeks an interview with Mistress Ker."

The Queen became pale as death.

"That dreadful man!" whispered she, as she caught Mary convulsively by the arm. "Save me from him, protect me from him. If I see him—I die."

"I comprehend you not, Madam," said Mary. "But if I can relieve you from the peril, I will. Master Lindsay," continued she, turning to the attendant. "Tell Sir Robert Bowes, that I neither wish his visits, nor permit them."

"No, no," said the Queen, "for the love

of Heaven—no. Bernard," continued she, addressing the astonished menial, "tell Sir Robert that Mistress Ker will receive him," and ere the young girl could remonstrate, she had hurried the usher from the room.

"Mary," continued she, "I have been a kind mistress to you, and, though half an hour by-gone you might have doubted it, love you well. You must see this man. From your own lips, he must hear his answer. Decide as you will. Say to him what you will. But remember this, that he holds in his hands my liberty—perhaps my life."

And ere her attendant was able to reply, Anne of Denmark had reached a side door and disappeared.

CHAPTER V.

JANUARY AND MAY.

Yes, Mary was alone, and what were her feelings, as she first realized to herself her position—the solitary tenant of the chamber, and like the martyr bound to the stake, compelled to remain there, to receive the addresses of a man she had never loved, and whom, since the misery she had been just subjected to on his account, she now positively detested.

Strange to say, fear did not enter into the sentiment. The Kers of Cessford were a bold and haughty race. Wardens of the East Marches, by a tenure which, like

the elective German empire of the Hapsburghs, the power of the occupants had made hereditary —heads of a great clan—strengthened by alliances, offensive and defensive, with minor feudatories—they acted, in fact, like independent princes, and set the mandates of their Suzerain in Edinburgh at defiance, whenever their interest or their ambition suggested resistance.

And Mary was a true daughter of their house. Brought up in the belief carefully instilled into her by Euphame Cranstoun, and the subordinate priestesses of the tyring room, that nothing on earth was greater, or more distinguished, than a Ker of Cessford's daughter, her naturally bold spirit had borrowed additional strength from education; and if her nerves had failed her in her interview with the Queen, it was less the result of her terrors, than her wounded sympathies. Passionately attached to her mistress, she had clung with fondness to the delusion that her affection was returned with equal ardour, and thus it was, that her energies fell prostrate before the fact, for the first time, and thus

suddenly and glaringly, presented to her mind, that the woman she had so loved, looked upon her merely as a puppet, to be cherished or abandoned as served the furtherance of her own ambitious plans.

With Bowes it was different. For him she had never felt affection. In that quarter, at least, no sympathies of the heart existed to warp the conduct in opposition to the dictates of the will. With respect to him, therefore, her natural character resumed its sway, and she contemplated his approach without fear.

Nor, with all her veneration for high intellect and mental power, was she affected by his lofty reputation for talent and energy. Streatlam was at no great distance from Cessford. Sir Robert was thus a near neighbour—and near neighbours are never worshipped. Nothing destroys our appreciation of great excellences so much as contiguity, or the early prejudices of rank, derived from local position. The pettiest Lincolnshire squire, in his secret heart, looked down with contempt upon Newton; the paltriest Ayrshire Laird would have deemed himself

degraded by associating with Burns—and if a prophet have no honour in his own country, that honour is still more rigorously withheld by the feudal magnates, whose broad acres or territorial influence, are more extensive than his, whose talents, and whose acquirements, have made him in the world's eyes their superior.

The feeling is universal, and Mary shared its influence. A Scrope—a Howard—a Hunsdon —she might have recognized as her equals—for they, like the heads of her own house, were Wardens of the Marches, and associated with them in the chase, or met them in the fray. But a mere Border Baron, like the Lord of Streatlam, who had never headed armies, or repelled inroads—whatever his reputation for talent, or the loftiness of his general position —was to her but an inferior noble.

Thus free from any personal fears she was able to survey calmly her position, and speculate upon the approaching interview. Of its object she was already informed. How the claims of the suitor were to be enforced, was a matter

more mysterious and more agitating. That Bowes had succeeded in obtaining a new and unexplained influence over the Queen, was evident, but on what grounds that influence rested, though she struggled hard to master the difficulty, was beyond her ken. One thing, however, she had gathered from the Queen's language, and that was, that the secret power which the English Ambassador possessed over her was a fearful one, and that probably it would be used as a means of extorting her own consent to an unwilling union.

"That consent," said Mary, half aloud as she communed with her own heart, "I will never give. But I will, at least, take upon myself the responsibility of the refusal. Yes, he shall never be husband of mine; but I will save my mistress (if save her I can) from this evil man's will."

Scarcely were the words uttered, when the door was opened, and Bernard Lindsay announced the English Ambassador.

Bowes seemed agitated. In fact he was so

A practised swordsman, an accomplished diplomatist—in the council or the fray, he was calm, cool, self-possessed—because in either he was conscious of his superiority, and felt that he could master at will, the sword or the argument of his opponent. And now he stood trembling before a young girl. Alas! age makes cowards of us, and never more so than when in opposite sexes, age is opposed to youth. Despise natural advantages as we may;—abuse, condemn, affect to disdain them; but where is the woman, or where the man, who in his secret heart, does not acknowledge their influence, and regret their loss. It is natural. Their possession is power—power to acquire that, which scarce aught else can acquire—sympathy—affection—love. Years may pass on, and bring as they pass—gold, possessions, rank, but what they confer, never compensates for what they take away: and Bowes, as he stood by Mary's side with shrunken limb, and pallid cheek, and furrowed brow, would have willingly surrendered his dear bought fame and

honours, if by their sacrifice, he could have repurchased for an hour, the bloom and beauty of his youth.

On entering the room he bowed profoundly, and his obeisance was responded to. The curtsey of Mary was low, formal, ceremonious; but there was nothing of embarrassment in it. It was that of one, in short, who had determined on the part she had to play, and who felt confident of her power to play it well.

Bowes's practised eye marked the character of the movement, and the expression. They puzzled him. "Has the Queen," said he to himself, "not made her acquainted with the reasons of my presence here? or does she welcome the lot assigned to her. But I will soon solve the mystery."

"Mistress Ker," said he, "I have solicited the honour of an interview. May I ask if her Majesty has informed you of its object?"

Mary bowed.

"It was to solicit the honour of your hand."

"I was informed so," was the cold reply.

"And I sought in this the intercession of the Queen."

"Will Sir Robert Bowes permit me to say that he did wrong. The Queen is my mistress, and my gracious mistress. But my hand is not hers to give."

"You are a Ward of the Crown."

"If Sir Robert had been wooing my lands, his conduct would have been unobjectionable."

"Madam," said Bowes, "if I have erred—the error was unintentional. If your father, Sir William, or your respected mother were alive, I should have applied to them to permit my attentions to their daughter, before I presumed to address her personally. Unhappily, the grave has closed over both, and of the Sovereign who represents them, I sought the sanction I would have asked of them."

"I understood you to speak merely of the Queen. The lands of Drummelzier are held of his Majesty."

"Madam, I applied to the King in the first instance."

"And he—?"

"Has given his consent."

"I do not question the words of Sir Robert Bowes; but he will not think it strange, if in a matter so important to myself, I should desire some warrant for their truth. Is there such?"

"Madam—there is."

"Do you possess it?"

"I do."

"And may I be permitted to see it?"

Bowes coloured—hesitated—and remained silent.

"You answer not, Sir Robert. I repeat my question. Is it possible," continued she, as she marked the agitation of her companion, "that I did Sir Robert Bowes too high honour, when I gave implicit credence to his words, and that the evidence exists not?"

"Nay, Madam, I spoke but the fact. I should have been well pleased if you had not intimated your doubt of it, but you have left me no choice. The document does exist, and I present it to you."

With the words he drew from the breast of

his doublet, a carefully scrolled paper, and placed it in Mary's hands.

She cast her eyes hurriedly over it.

"What is this?" said she, as the colour mounted to her cheeks. "A deed of bargain and sale! The King's right of marriage and wardship over Mary Ker, assigned to the Knight of Streatlam for one thousand merks. Is this the permission you spoke of? Does Sir Robert Bowes imagine he is in the country of the Grand Turk, and that when he goes a wooing, he buys his bride?"

"Mistress Ker blames me, but without cause. When a man attaches value to a jewel, he does his best to assure its possession. You know the necessities of the King, and how completely he is the slave of the best bidder. Had I not secured this document, it might have been acquired by another, and then what hope could I have entertained of possessing your hand."

"It would have been more respectful, at least, if you had delayed the purchase till you had ascertained the wishes of her, who was most interested in it."

"Madam, love is jealous, and if it was an error, it is one, that the fears of affection might excuse."

"I could have argued the matter with you, had I any interest in the argument, but I have none, and I hasten to conclude this interview. You have done me the honour, Sir Robert, as I learned from the Queen, to offer me your hand. I regret that I cannot reciprocate your preference. We must be for the future, as we have been in the past—strangers."

"Nay, Madam," said Bowes, "hear me, before you decide. There are—I know, I confess it,—differences in our ages, which might seem to make our union unsuitable; but if you can condescend to forget these, what is there to bar a marriage between you and me. You have talents above your sex, ambition above your sex, and a union with me will give ample scope for both. I am, at present, master of this Court, for James and his Queen are puppets that must obey my will. There is before me a future even more brilliant; and you, if you were my wife, with wisdom to aid my counsels, and

beauty to grace my triumph, would stand forth (whoever may bear the name) the real Queen of the kingdom I rule now, and of that, which I must rule hereafter."

"It is impossible, Sir Robert!"

"Yet once more, hear me. I love you, Mary, I love you; not with the ephemeral passion, which, in boyhood, makes a woman worshipped to-day, and forgotten to-morrow, but with that earnest enduring love, which borrows strength from time, and to which, every year, as it passes, adds fresh affection, and lends new dignity. Does it go for nothing in your eyes, that I, who rule senates and sway kingdoms—I, whose name is known as one of the mighty ones of the earth, have only striven for these distinctions and joy in their possession, that I might lay my honours at your feet—and, the master of others, glory in being your slave."

As he spoke, he sank upon one knee, and gazed at Mary, with a look that left no doubt of the sincerity of the feeling. For once, at least, the man of wiles had laid aside his cunning,

and whatever at other times and to others—he now spoke as he felt, and spoke earnestly.

Mary read the truth of the sentiment in his eye, and it seemed to soften her; for intense affection, however misplaced, is ever, to the woman who is its object, an evidence of respect. And it was in language, the tones of which were almost kind, that she addressed him.

"You pain me deeply, Sir Robert. Believe me, I am not ignorant of your talents, nor wanting in admiration for them. But there are other qualities necessary to the felicity of married life and—"

"And these I possess not."

"Nay, I said not so. With another, you may find the happiness you seek."

"But not with you."

Mary shook her head.

"Yet time, perhaps."

Again she made a sign of dissent.

"Has another, may I ask—?"

"Sir Robert," said she, and her face flushed with anger, as she drew herself to her full height, "this is too presumptuous. That is a

question, which, neither you, nor any man, has a right to ask of me. Rise Sir. Nay, I insist upon it. Rise, I will no longer prolong this interview or permit this folly."

Bowes obeyed her commands. But the compressed lip and the scowl upon the brow, told distinctly enough that his evil nature had resumed its mastery.

"It was as I suspected," said he, in a tone of intense bitterness. "That flush on your cheek, lady, when I spoke of another suitor, told its own tale. Yes, a younger lover has won the prize I sought for, and it needs no sorcery to guess his name. The Warden of the West Marches, has more points in his hose, and slashes in his doublet, than any gallant in Court. How was I mad enough to suppose that the distinctions of a life could weigh in a woman's eyes, against such gew-gaws."

"This is too insolent, Sir. Insolent to the Lord Warden as well as to myself. Nay, I marked your sneer, but I regard it not. He is no longer suitor of mine, for it is known to others, and I doubt not to you, that I have re-

jected his hand. Yet, though I love him not, I will say this in his honour, that his conduct was most noble; and that if he sought my hand, he sought it from myself, and did not endeavour to become its possessor, through the aid of a King's avarice, or a Queen's fears."

"Ha!" said Bowes, with a scornful laugh. "The Jer-falcon of the North then, has stooped from its perch;—the haughty Anne of Denmark fears."

"Shame on you that she does so! By what mysterious means you have acquired your power, I know not, but I know that you have made her your slave, and if her menaces could have won me, I should have been now your affianced bride. But look on me, Sir Robert," continued she, as she drew herself up to her full height, and glance and bearing gave evidence of her haughty, self-possessed nature. "I am proud to have the opportunity of proving to the Ambassador of England, that I am worthy of the love with which he honours me. Look on me, I say. Does my eye falter. Does my lip lose its firmness or my cheek its colour?

No. Learn from them and from me, that the daughter of Cessford yields not to menace, and that when she bestows her hand, it is only when she, and she alone, wills it."

The cheek of Bowes flushed crimson, his fingers clenched unconsciously, the handle of his dagger, and as he bent forward, feature and look marked the intensity of hate.

"You defy me then," said he, in a low hissing voice, each word of which fell singly from his lips. "You defy me. Be it so. I have ever loved open war better than veiled enmity. Now hear me. My wife you *shall* be. The King cannot oppose my wishes. The Queen dare not. And who—with this royal mandate in my hand, which, by the time-honoured laws of this feudal kingdom makes me your master—who, I say, will dare to cross my path, or wrest from me my prey. So crow as loud as you will, my pretty bird. Ruffle your feathers while you may. No partridge was ever faster in falcon's clutch, than I hold you in mine. And now get you to your tyring-room, and prepare ye for your bridal; for ere a week be over, the

bells of St. Michael's will peal a joyous note, as they announce to the burghers of Linlithgow, the marriage of Mistress Mary Ker with the Ambassador of England."

He bowed low as he spoke, and with a glance, in which scorn and admiration—love and hate—were strangely mingled, left the room.

CHAPTER VI.

THE USES OF A DISCARDED LOVER.

MARY had fought the fight bravely, for the excitement of the moment had supplied strength and energy; but with Bowes, vanished her courage. The nerves had been overstrung, the re-action was proportionably violent, and sinking into a chair, she burst into tears.

Some minutes elapsed in this fashion, and still she wept, unconscious of the passing moments, and indeed of everything around her. All at once a kind hand was laid upon her shoulder, and Lady Beatrice, who had entered unobserved, exclaimed,

"Why, my love, what means this? You

are weeping. Good heavens! your temples are burning. Your pulse is in high fever. You must to bed."

"No, no," said Mary, "It is air I want. Give me air. I am choking. Could I breathe but the fresh air, I should be well."

Lady Beatrice lost not a moment. Snatching a scarf from one of the seats, she flung it over Mary's head and shoulders, and hurried her down a narrow staircase which had been scooped out of the thickness of the outer wall, and led to "The Pleasaunce," as it was termed,—the combined gardens and pleasure grounds of the Palace, which stretched to the westward along the banks of the lake.

No better scene could have been imagined for retirement. The miniature avenues were skirted on either side with thick and lofty hedges of laurel and holly, now presenting the idea of an unbroken solitude, and now as they crossed at right angles their brother alleys, offering a glimpse of the steep formal gables of the town, or the sparkling waters of the little

inland sea, with brake and forest stretching beyond it. Here and there were scattered, after the French fashion, stone pavilions — the substantial summer-houses of the period—and into one of these the young nurse conducted her drooping charge, and placing her gently on the bench which encircled its interior, took her seat beside her.

"And now, love," said she, as she passed her arm round her waist, "tell me the meaning of all this?"

"Can you not guess?" was the faintly muttered reply.

"'I faith, *ma mie*, not I. My brother, the Earl, did his best at Padua to instruct me in those mysteries of magic, which he affects so much, but I was but a poor scholar—and so as I have no weird book to tell me of your adventures, you must e'en play the wizard yourself."

The story was soon told. The strange influence which Bowes, in his short audience, had contrived to establish over the Queen—the

effort made to induce Mary's acceptance of him —the mysterious hints of the fatal consequences that might follow his rejection—her interview with Bowes himself—her resolute denial of his suit, his threats—his insolent assurance of success—his parting counsel, were each in turn poured into the ear of the astonished auditor. The narrative seemed to have the effect of exercising a composing influence over the narrator, for it was in a tone comparatively calm, that Mary continued.

"And now, Beatrice, what say you to this strange story? And what think you of this man's boastings?"

Lady Beatrice remained silent.

"You do not answer me. Beatrice, dear Beatrice, you cannot think he has the power to carry his threats into effect?"

There was still no reply. But the increasing gravity of her companion's expression, intimated distinctly enough, that the difficulty was one of no ordinary character.

"Speak to me, Beatrice. Why do you not speak to me? That silence of yours terrifies

me more than I can express. You do not believe that this man really possesses the power of which he boasts?"

"You are a Crown Ward."

"Well."

"You are under age."

"I know it."

"The law gives to the Superior lord, the guardianship of his vassal."

"I do not dispute it. He has the rent of my lands."

"He has more. He has the right to dispose of his vassal in marriage."

"But not against her will. There can be no statute to make that law."

"There are laws, love, which rest upon custom, as well as upon statute."

"And such you hold to exist here."

"Alas! even so."

"God help me!" said Mary, "is that true? They call this a Christian country, and I am bargained for, and sold like an Eastern slave."

Her companion shook her head in silent sympathy.

"But, Beatrice," continued the weeping girl, "you have been among the Almains, and on the Rhine. You have visited France. You have travelled beyond the Mountains. You are wise. Can you not counsel me in this thing?"

There was something muttered, but it was not audible.

"Yet," said Mary in a firmer tone, as her natural energy returned to her, "there must be some means of escape. I cannot be the first, whom a feudal superior would have married to a man against her will. At Padua—at Venice —have you not heard of such tyranny, and of its remedy?"

"Yes," said Lady Beatrice, briefly, "I have heard of both. The women of the South brook not interference in the affairs of the heart."

"And why should we Northern maidens be more patient? But how escape they the man they hate?"

"Were the English Ambassador a Magnifico of Venice, and you a daughter of the Signory, ere another sun arose, he would be at the

bottom of the Grand Canal, with a bravo's poniard in his breast."

Mary shuddered.

"Yes, love," continued her companion, "it is horrible. But in these southern lands, the act follows fast upon the thought, and I have lived in them so long, that such deeds scarce scare me. And can you wonder at them? A worm turns upon him who treads on it; and why not a woman? and if Heaven has denied her the strength to defend herself, why should she not use her wit, or her wealth, to purchase elsewhere the means of resistance she cannot offer?"

"No, no, the thought is terrible. And you, Beatrice, would you counsel this?"

"Would I meet violence by violence? Yes! Not by the bravo or the poinard, indeed; not by the secret blow, but by the open and honourable adversary. This man—this Bowes—presumes upon his strength. You must find one still stronger to meet him. It is a duty which a brother's manhood owes to a sister's safety. A daughter of Cessford is about to be

made a bondswoman, and the head of her house must give her freedom."

"It would be," said Mary, "it is a vain hope. You know not my brother. I shame to speak it," continued she, as a deep blush coloured her brow and cheek, "but he is worldly. For years he has importuned the King to give him the Earldom of Roxburgh, and he would aid, rather than oppose a match likely to furnish one more prop to his miserable ambition."

"Alas! that it should be so; and yet there are others in the world that have nobler sentiments."

"There may be, but upon what plea can I claim their aid? The English Ambassador is known to be skilful with his weapon. Men say that it is death to be opposed to him. And where is he who, to save me, would face such jeopardy?"

"I know of none," said Lady Beatrice, in a desponding tone. "But no, I was in error," cried she. "There is such a man, and by God's blessing, here he comes," and she started from her seat, and pointed eagerly to the figure of a

cavalier, who appeared at the far end of the avenue, moving along at a slow pace, with his looks fixed upon the ground, evidently communing with his own thoughts.

Mary's eyes followed the direction of her friend's finger, and had no difficulty in recognizing the new comer.

"It is the Lord Warden," said she, with a slight scream. "No, no, Beatrice," continued she, as she once more sank back in her seat, "hateful as my lot is like to be, I would endure it, endure it a thousand times over, rather than be indebted to him for liberty."

Lady Beatrice gave no heed to her words, but raised her voice to a full pitch. Her cry caught the ear of the intruder, and a wave of her handkerchief summoned him towards them.

Mary laid her hand upon her arm. "Are you mad, Beatrice?" said she. "Would you kill me with shame? Would you expose me to that man's taunts, or worse still, to his pity?"

Her companion listened not—answered not: but with her eyes steadily fixed on Buccleugh, awaited his now rapid approach.

As the young Baron came nearer, he appeared to recognize the occupants of the pavilion, for suddenly his step relaxed in its speed, and he first hesitated, and then stood still. A fresh signal from Lady Beatrice, however, once more invited his advance, and at a slow pace and with evident unwillingness he drew nigh. For an instant, he seemed doubtful how to act, and agitation and anger, each in turn, passed across his features; but, at length, as if some internal thought had prompted the movement, he uncovered; and with hat in hand, bent low before the two young girls. The obeisance was profound, but it was not the less cold and haughty, and as he recovered himself, he stood respectful and yet silent.

If such were his feelings, what was the torture of Mary's. She had done her best, from time to time, to prevent the renewal of the summons, but when her efforts were unavailing, she submitted to her fate, and with clasped hands resting on her knees, and her eyes fixed upon the ground, awaited the strange interview, flushing and paling by turns, while at intervals,

the trembling of the eye-lids, or the quivering of the lip, bore testimony to the internal agony.

As for Beatrice, her energetic nature had forgotten every thing but her purpose and its success, and eagerly did she address the Lord Warden.

"You here! Buccleugh;" said she, with a smile, "most welcome to Linlithgow. When arrived you?"

"But last night, Madam."

"And you have come in a happy hour. You may remember when we were in Padua, we used to read together the pages of Ariosto, and learned how in the East, there existed giants, and magicians, and ogres, who carried off dames and damsels against their will; and how young and beautiful knights, put lance in rest, and saved the fair ladies from their loathsome suitors."

"Madam, I remember."

"Be it known to you now, though we dreamed not of it, that such monsters are to be found in Scotland, as well as in Egypt, in Araby, or among the men of Ind. And as you have of

late received your spurs from King James, I call upon you to keep your vow to God and the ladies, and prove yourself in their cause, *chevalier preux et loyal.*"

"I understand you not well," said the Lord Warden. "Can I in aught, be of service to the Lady Beatrice Ruthven?"

"To me, in nothing. Thanks to the Gods. I am not thought of a divine beauty enough, to be worth running away with."

"Who then, is the unhappy damsel?"

"Our fair friend by my side, here."

"You do me an honour, Madam, that I deserve not. Mistress Ker is your friend. It is a distinction to which I pretend not."

"Well: be it so. My friend, let us call her. We will not quarrel about meaningless phrases."

"Pardon me for saying so, but the phrase is not meaningless. In aught that concerns the Lady Beatrice Ruthven, I am ready. I have neither the wish, nor the right, to intrude my aid beyond her."

"You have. You must. For I your friend, your old ally, your sister by adoption, as ye used to call me, have need of you, and that instantly, urgently."

"Madam, I comprehend you not."

"I will be plain then, as a print-book. Sir Robert Bowes has bought from the King, Mary's wardship and marriage."

"It may be so," was the reply, uttered in tones of cold and chilling indifference.

"She loves him not, but he insists upon marrying her."

"It is a proof of his good taste."

"How!" said Beatrice, as her eyes flashed with anger. "Do you say this? How dare you speak in such a fashion?"

"Madam, if I have erred, it was unintentionally. Shape but the phrase for me, and I will pronounce it."

"Say then," said his impassioned companion, "what you ought to say. That you would die a thousand deaths, rather than permit such a union."

"Madam, I know my place better; I have too much respect for the feelings of your friend."

"Would you drive me mad with your jealous follies?" said Lady Beatrice, clenching her fist, and stamping the ground with her fairy like foot, "and is it come to this, Sir Walter, that all those professions of friendship, which you have a thousand and a thousand times lavished upon me and my brother, are but words—sounds—empty air?"

Nothing had been said to warrant the reproach, but the young noble, seemed to read the hidden thought, for he appeared violently agitated, and remained for some time silent.

"Lady Beatrice," said he, at length, "you do me wrong. I spoke at Padua as I felt then, and as I feel now. Every protestation which I made to you or Gowrie, was made in simple honesty; and I am ready to prove it, were death the price of the proof. What ask you of me?"

Lady Beatrice approached him, and in a low distinct tone, whispered in his ear—"Kill Bowes."

Buccleugh started.

"Kill Bowes!" said he, "and wherefore? has he wronged you?"

"Yes, for he has wronged this girl, my friend, my sister, the being on earth I most cling to. He would win her by force to be his wife. He has purchased the consent of King and Queen, and if he die not, she dies; for she could not live the bride of a man she loathes."

"And does Mistress Ker?" said the Lord Warden, in a cold tone, as he turned towards Mary. "Does she know of this? Does she wish this? Does she ask this?"

"No, no, Sir Walter," said the half fainting girl, aroused by the taunt, into momentary energy. "I would die a thousand deaths, ere I would stoop to the degradation of receiving such aid from your hand."

"You hear, Madam," said Buccleugh, in a sarcastic tone, once more turning to Beatrice. "You hear the answer. Your friend the person injured, will not that I meddle in this matter. I should but add to her griefs in presuming to be her protector."

And the intense bitterness of the tone, jarred strangely with the cold measured intonation of the words.

The fair sister of Lord Gowrie seemed for a moment doubtful how to act, for she turned alternately from one of her companions to the other, as if uncertain alike whom to address or what to say. Gradually, however, her glance fixed itself on Mary. The excitement of the last two hours, was beginning to tell its tale. The Queen's neglect—mortified pride—despair —had each lent their aid, and she now lay back against the wall, with her eyes closed—her cheek colourless—her lips open—scarce hearing —scarce breathing — the impersonation of exhaustion and sorrow. The sight appeared to determine Lady Beatrice, for all at once she turned to Buccleugh, and in accents which bespoke a calm determination, she said.

"Sir Walter Scott, we are not here to mince phrases, nor am I in a mood to play with words. You have often protested your affection to my house. Are you prepared to

prove that affection? Answer me yea or nay?"

"Madam, I am."

"What cause of offence may exist between you and that girl, I care not; nor is it of her I speak. I speak of myself. It is necessary to my happiness, that this Sir Robert Bowes, this Ambassador of England should die. Do you mark me—*die*. I am here friendless; without father, without brother, without kinsman. I have been insulted in the person of another. Will you avenge me?"

"Madam—with my blood—with my life—with everything — but my honour." He hesitated for a moment, and then in an embarrassed tone, continued, "You do not ask it of me to have him dealt with privately."

"No, no, no," replied his companion, hurriedly. "I ask nothing of you, that I would not ask of Gowrie. Man to man—foot to foot——in the light of day be the combat, as knight should meet knight, and noble—noble."

"Be it so, Madam. Within the hour he underlies my challenge."

"It is well. And so God defend the right."

The young man turned to depart, and with the movement, Beatrice's courage seemed to have deserted her, for with agitated steps she hurried after him, and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Walter," said she, in tones so faint, that they scarce fell upon the ear, "you do not curse me?"

"Curse you Beatrice! Do you ask?"

The two looked into each other's eyes. The glance was long, earnest, mournful. Insensibly the girl drew him towards her. Insensibly, too, with a cold and tremulous lip, she kissed his cheek, and his brow. And then, as if a sudden consciousness had come over her, she hurriedly averted her head, and covered her face with her hands.

Some three minutes might have thus elasped, when she once more raised her eyes, and looked

around her. Within the pavilion, the death-like figure lay still extended on the bench, but without, she herself was the garden's sole occupant. The Lord Warden was gone.

CHAPTER VII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

THE lodgings of the Baron of Branksome—for in that simple age, the highest noble was content with such accommodation—were near the east end of the straggling street, which formed the sole thoroughfare of the village of Linlithgow. The house belonged to a William Turnbull, or Wullie Trummell as he was called, one of the officials of the little town, and moreover a member of a clan, from time immemorial, the allies of the house of Buccleugh—a circumstance which had probably obtained for the Burgher Baillie, the honour of being selected as the host of the great Border noble.

The ground floor of the building was occupied by a shop. It was open towards the street in a booth-like fashion, while all around, piled on shelf and counter, or dependant from the roof, were the various wares which formed its contents. Coats of plate armour and bales of broad cloth, Finnan haddocks and velvet doublets, hobnail shoes and lace ruffs, medicines and fish-hooks, coils of rope and hanks of sewing silk, every thing, in short, that could minister to the comfort of man or woman, were to be found in the establishment. The abundance and the universality of the supply, had given the trader a high position among his fellow-citizens; and far and near, in low country farm, and mountain glen, he was known by the honourable designation of "Wullie sell a' thing." It would have been well if the arrangement of the goods had merited admiration, as justly as their quantity and variety. But to say the truth, the booth was no bad representation of Chaos; and the first glance satisfied the spectator, of the truth of the favourite phrase of the bustling proprietor, as he toiled through

his bales in search of something for a customer. "I hae plenty o't, if I only kenned where to find it."

The upper part of the mansion was appropriated to the Lord Warden. Three closets, each lighted by a window looking on the street, formed the sleeping apartments. While at the back was the solitary sitting room. Its windows opened upon a lawn, skirted to the southward by a bye-lane; and, after the model of the pleasure grounds of the palace, covered in the neighbourhood of the house, with turf, and dotted with hawthorn and holly.

In this apartment sat our old friend Frank Mowbray. Beside him was a table on which were the remains of a venison pasty, flanked by a silver flagon, once filled with Bordeaux; but whose empty interior now testified, that the young Lord of Barnbougle had not left his appetite at Branksome, but could play his part as a trencherman, with as distinguished success at Court as in country. The meal was apparently just over, and the contented Sybarite lay back in the recesses of an unwieldy arm-

chair, his extended limbs supported by a stool; the half-closed eye and dreamy mouth, the repose alike of face and limbs, all testifying that he had received from Heaven, that best and rarest of gifts, a good digestion.

Suddenly, however, he was roused from his lethargy—a quick step was heard upon the stair—the door was hurriedly opened, and Buccleugh entered.

"What in God's name is the matter?" said Mowbray, as he sprang to his feet. "Your cheek is flushed, your eyes bloodshot, your teeth set. Has any one bitten his glove at you?"

In a few words, Buccleugh communicated to his faithful companion, the strange scene which had taken place in the garden, and the still stranger mission with which he had been intrusted. Mowbray listened with undisguised astonishment, lifting his hands at intervals, as if scarcely able to credit the intelligence. As soon, however, as the Lord Warden had intimated to him his intention of sending him on a hostile mission to the English Ambassador, Mowbray's self-possession returned

at once. Fighting in his own person, or aiding and assisting in the deadly combats of others, was—if we except his talents at the dinner table—the only matter which he understood thoroughly; and with the self-possessed air of one who was master of his subject, he received his instructions, and proceeded to the quarters of Sir Robert Bowes.

He was admitted at once, but his mission was not destined to be successful. Sir Robert Bowes listened to the defiance with a satirical smile.

"Give my respects," said he, "to him who sent you. Tell him that I am at present, too much occupied in paying the expected attentions to my bride, and in making the preparations for my marriage, to accept his cartel. As soon, however, as the wedding is over, I am at the service of the Lord Warden. If, indeed," added he, in a dry tone, "the Baron of Branksome be as much disposed to break a lance in honour of the fair Dame of Streatlam, as he now is for the Queen's maiden—Mistress Mary Ker."

Mowbray remonstrated, and would have endeavoured to force him to an immediate meeting, but it was in vain; and nought was left for it, but to return and communicate the unsuccessful issue of his mission.

The plan then, of Lady Beatrice, cunningly devised as it had been, had failed, and all that remained was to inform her of its failure. The young Baron of Barnbougle, was accordingly despatched to the palace, for the purpose of conveying the intelligence to the sister of Lord Gowrie, as well as to express the regrets of the Lord Warden, that he had been unable to succeed in the matter, to which the Lady Beatrice Ruthven had attached so much importance.

The messenger departed, and Buccleugh was once more alone.

And what were his feelings?

It was but two hours since he had entered the garden of the palace; and yet, into those two hours, seemed to have been crowded the events of a life—the proposal of Bowes—the refusal of Mary—the appeal to his affection by Beatrice—the challenge—its rejection and the

probable result. Yes—the girl whom he had loved, was to be wedded to another. Well, what was that to him? He had no claim to her hand. Twice had she rejected him—nay more, he had voluntarily bound himself, by a vow, never to ask her again. And yet, with the inconsistency which marks human nature, when that which had hitherto been but a dream presented itself to his eyes as a reality, he was unable to contemplate it with philosophy.

If the act had been voluntary on Mary's part —if in all the joyousness of her youth and beauty she had bestowed herself upon a rival, he could have borne it. His pride would have come to his aid, and he would have thought only of the contemptuous words spoken on the banks of the Yarrow, and the haughtiness of glance and tone that had given them double poignancy. But there was now nothing to minister to his resentment, or support hostile memories. The pale, death-like face, in the pavilion in the royal garden, every where haunted him; and his anger, his sorrow melted away in the recollection of a deeper despair.

"Yes," muttered he to himself, as once or twice he passed the back of his hand across his eyes, to brush away a tear, "it were selfish to murmur at my lot. The hand of Heaven has been heavy upon me, but what has it been upon her. If her sentiments be such as Lady Beatrice avers—what a fate! To pass life without an object for affection! Worse—worse—to linger on, hours, and days, and years, in constant association with a being we loathe. Why, the tales they told me in Venice, of the dungeons of the Signory, where they chained a living body to a dead, were scarce more fearful." He paused for awhile, as if communing with himself. "No," continued he, as he spoke aloud the subject of his meditations. "There are no means of averting it—none. The King's power, in this matter, is absolute, and I can well guess, that with his hopes of the English succession, he is little disposed to thwart one that can make or mar them. No—there is no hope; and the Flower of the Border will be consigned to the arms of a man, who will look on her, as a mere creature of his

pleasure, or but another puppet to be played in that game of ambition, which is the object of his life. But what matters it to me?" continued he, pettishly. "She never could have been bride of mine. And why need I vex myself whether her future lord be an old man or a young one."

He rose as he spoke, and approaching the window, fixed his eyes upon some ragged hollies grouped in the grounds below, as if he would have diverted his thoughts by tracing the fantastic outlines of their branches.

He had stood thus for some minutes, when a hand was gently laid upon his arm. He turned with a start, as if some thread of memory had been broken, and found standing beside him, Octavio Baldi.

Little more than a week had elapsed since the meeting of the Italian pedlar and the Scottish noble, and yet notwithstanding the difference of their rank, more especially in an age when the distinctions of rank were strongly marked, they had become, to use the phrase in

no exaggerated sense, intimate. Something of this might be attributed to the romance and the circumstances of their first meeting ; for great dangers break down conventionalities, and in the hour of trial, man clings to his fellow man, without reference to the generally recognized position possessed by either in society. Besides, few things tend more to produce liking, than a consciousness of benefits conferred. Buccleugh had saved the Signor's life, and he naturally looked upon him with favour. Independently of this, in those sunny climes which the traveller had announced as his birth-place, the young noble had spent some happy years, and he felt the natural wish of a generous heart, to repay the hospitality of their inhabitants, by shewing kindness to one of their race, who was now, as he himself had been, a stranger in a foreign land.

Such was the feeling which had dictated his remaining at Peebles, and playing the part of no careless nurse to the wounded man. But it was the companionship of the five days during

which they were detained in the little town, that matured the chance act of charity into what might be termed friendship.

Buccleugh, in obedience to the mandate of his sovereign—who had feared his being involved in the treasonable plots of his mother's second husband, the Earl of Bothwell—had made a lengthened sojourn on the continent, in a sort of honourable exile. He had traversed France and the Low Countries—the Rhine-land and Northern Italy—and had become familiar with courts and camps—with the places that spoke of the memory of the past, and the men whose great deeds had given distinction to the present, and a shape to the future. Pictures and statues, arms and dress, the beautiful and the wise, had each occupied him by turns; and he had revisited his native land, only to find, like the Hebrew king of old, that knowledge is not happiness. The scenes that had pleased before, dissatisfied him. The sports that, in former years, had occupied him agreeably, possessed in his present eyes small charm. The very Court of Scotland, to the imagination of

the inhabitants of Linlithgow, gorgeous as that of Haroun Alraschid, seemed to him poverty stricken—its wits dull—its language coarse—its manners unmannerly.

The new feelings were too frequent in their recurrence not to produce regrets, and the Lord Warden, mixing daily with a crowd which was not society, sighed in secret for some congenial spirit, to whom he could speak of the lands he had left—of their wisdom and their follies, their painting, their poetry, their sculpture, their architecture, their music.

And all this, so long desired, and desired in vain, he had found in a chance companionship, commenced in a scuffle, by a ruined road-side alehouse.

And yet, when analysed, the causes of the new intimacy appeared simple enough. In the sixteenth century, the goldsmiths of Italy were famous. Even at the present day, the world cannot rival Venice in the exquisite beauty of her chain-work; and at the period of our story, when the arts were less developed, the contrast between her manufactures, and

those of the nations beyond the Alps, was even more striking. But commerce was in its infancy —the correspondence between mercantile houses rare; and consequently the Italian manufacturers of jewellery were forced themselves to become travellers in search of a market for their wares. The goods in fabric, or material, were of immense value. The noble, the wealthy, the refined, contended eagerly for their purchase: and thus their vendors had the *entrée* throughout Europe, of castle and palace, admission to its best society, a place in its first festivals, and with such admission, an acquaintance with everything that art, or science, politics, or gossip made worth knowing.

Such, at least, were the reasons assigned by the Signor Octavio for the knowledge which he possessed of European manners, and the different phases in which these manners exemplified themselves. Whatever were the cause, and however obtained, there was no doubt of the fact, that that knowledge was almost universal; and during the five days delay at Peebles, necessary for the restoration of the health of the Italian, the Lord

Warden found himself, for the first time since his return to Scotland, in communion with a kindred spirit—one even more versant than himself with the lands which had been the place of his sojourn—and able, by powers of conversation of the highest order, to illustrate a thousand matters which the Border Baron had hitherto but seen darkly.

The consequences may be guessed at. The intimacy between the two young men, notwithstanding their difference in rank, progressed rapidly, and on reaching Linlithgow, it had advanced so far, that the Warden would not listen to Octavio Baldi's proposition of going in search of quarters for himself, but insisted on his accompanying him to the house of the Burgher dignitary, which formed, when he was in attendance upon the Court, his usual residence. And there the Merchant of Venice was now an established inmate—enough so, indeed, almost to excite the jealousy of the easy-tempered and usually pococurante Frank Mowbray.

It was, therefore, with the manner, which, though in the highest degree respectful, never-

theless exhibited a certain consciousness that he was a favoured guest, that the Italian approached his host.

"You here, Signor Octavio?" said Buccleugh with a smile, as if he welcomed anything that would distract him from his present thoughts, "and in gala attire! Your mails, I see, have arrived from Leith."

"Yes, my messenger from Peebles has done his work well, and they are here."

"So much for the outward, now for the inward man. How is the invalid?"

"The invalid no longer," was the reply. "The wounded arm—thanks to your nursing, and the learned medico at Peebles, is well. I can move it freely. Fortunately, too, it was the left. Had my right been disabled—"

"You could not," said Buccleugh, laughing, "have presented your trinket-box to the ladies with the grace that commands success."

"*Per Bacco!* Signor, my right hand, when need serves, can do other things than handle trinkets. But I came not hither to speak of my paltry wound."

"And what sought you?"

His companion seemed embarrassed.

"Nay," said he, after a while, "Italian as I am, I sometimes hold mystery to be out of place, and I do so here."

"Well, man, what want you? Out with it."

"To speak the truth then, I was looking from my window, but a short time by gone, when I saw the Signor Mowbray leave the house. He had pulled his bonnet over his brow—his teeth were set—his port lofty—his step firm—his right hand upon his dagger, and I guessed—"

"What?"

"It has been my business to read men, my Lord. The Signor Francisco is no difficult book, and I guessed he had gone upon a hostile mission."

"Ha!"

"And so you will pardon my presumption—but mine, for we carry goods of value about us, is a perilous life."

"Well?"

"I was about to add, that I, like my fellows

can, on occasion, do a man's work, with a man's weapons; and if it were that your Lordship needed the aid of my poor arm, it is at your service."

"No," said the Warden, as if speaking to himself, rather than to his companion, "no such good fortune. That chance is over."

"I was right, then. There is a quarrel. Do I offend you, if I ask the cause?"

Buccleugh appeared to hesitate.

The practised eye of his companion marked the struggle, and interpreted it well.

"I am bound to your Lordship for life," said he, in a voice which bore evidence of the honesty of the sentiment he expressed, "and I would fain do something towards paying the debt. Forgive me for saying so, but as I stood by you at the window, long ere you marked my presence. I could read in your face, hope—anger—agitation—sorrow. Do not dishonour me by supposing that I seek to gratify an idle curiosity, but I have lived in evil times, and I have seen much peril, and it may be, if your Lordship

would trust me in this matter, I might advise you."

"I thank you for your kindness, Signor, and I will admit this much, that you boast not amiss, when you say that you read men well. I am in sorrow. But you can aid me not. Heaven, and Heaven alone has the power."

"And yet Heaven works only by human agency. You have been my physician. Let me be yours. A sick heart is a deadlier disease than a sick arm—and it may chance that if I knew the cause of the evil, I might remove it."

Buccleugh gazed at him long and anxiously, and more than once he appeared to hesitate. In his ordinary mood, he would have repelled the question, and the intruder. But sorrow softens the heart, and in our dark hour, sympathy is dear to us, come from where it will.

"Yes," said he, as after having several times hurriedly traversed the chamber, he stopped abruptly opposite his companion, "I will tell you, though I believe not that you can aid me.

But a drowning man grasps at a straw, and I would not throw away a chance, however feeble, of safety."

And in a few words he hurriedly narrated the state of the feudal law, and the King's power over the vassal—the pretensions of Bowes—the refusal of Mary—the vain attempt to arrest her fate—the challenge, and its rejection.

"Ha! now I understand," said the Italian, "and yet there is one thing that I comprehend not. I have heard of this Signor Roberto. Men say that he is no mean swordsman, and that they who have met him, have seldom looked upon another sun. Such might have been your fate. What cause was there for you to face it? Are you the maiden's kinsman?"

The young noble made an effort to reply, but the words died upon his lips.

His agitation did not escape the notice of the Italian.

"I comprehend now," said he. "When Buondelmonte married the fair daughter of the

Donati, Carlo Amadei stabbed him at the end of the Ponte Vecchio. You would have crossed swords with the Envoy of England, that you might secure the maiden's hand."

"I had no such wish."

"Then why undertake an adventure that concerned you not?"

Once more Buccleugh hesitated.

His companion remarked the feeling, and appeared to understand it, for it was in a tone of calm expostulation that he continued.

"You do not, my Lord Warden, (to repeat what I said before,) suppose that I ask these questions from mere curiosity. You believe that I feel grateful for the services you have rendered me, and would prove my gratitude?"

Buccleugh gave a slight inclination of assent.

"Do me then the honour to answer me?"

"I will be frank with you," said his companion, at length. "When I was in Italy, I passed a year at Padua with Lord Gowrie and Alexander Ruthven. Lady Beatrice was

with her brothers. They were kind to me, and kindness is doubly welcome in a foreign land.

"Although they were not of your kin, you became to them as a kinsman."

"Even so. I swore to them, that if need were, I should shed my blood in their cause—and I was willing to prove it."

"In what?"

"In this, that Lady Beatrice holds Mistress Ker as a sister, and knowing of her distaste to Sir Robert Bowes, called on me to redeem my promise of affection to her house."

"It was at the instance of Lady Beatrice then, that you undertook this quarrel."

"It was."

"And there was no other feeling?"

"None."

"No wish to preserve the Queen's maiden from the arms of the Ambassador of England, in order that you might consign her to your own?"

"None."

If it had been the intention of the speaker to

give by intonation, decision to his language, the effort was unsuccessful, for there was a tremulousness in the voice which whispered distinctly enough, that the heart refused its warrant to the expressions of the lip.

The hesitation did not escape the Italian.

"At length," said he, with a smile that seemed to contradict his words, "I understand. It was from no love for this maiden, but solely from a desire to gratify the wishes of Lady Beatrice Ruthven, that you undertook to rescue her friend from the importunities of the Ambassador of England."

Buccleugh bowed a grave assent.

"And you tell me, that this Envoy—this Signor Roberto—is supported by the King and by the Queen."

"He is so."

"And King James has sold him the right of marriage. And Queen Anne, for reasons you know not, lends him equally her aid."

"Still you are correct."

"But if the King withdrew his consent, and the Queen hers, the maiden might be free?"

"The King has not the power. Bowes shewed to Mowbray this morning, a carefully scrolled bond, by which James, upon the consideration of the payment of certain monies, assigned to him his right, and no present withdrawal of it would avail any thing, unless that bond were restored or cancelled. As for the Queen, of her I can say nothing. But Mowbray—if his somewhat dull brain misled him not—gathered this morning, that Bowes holds over her some fearful power, so that, however favourable might be her personal wishes, she dare not exercise them. And last of all, if the bond were cancelled, and the permission of both King and Queen withdrawn to-day—such is the English Envoy's subtlety—there is no assurance but they may be granted again to-morrow."

The difficulty of the question submitted to his judgment seemed to impress the Italian, for he pondered long and anxiously. A smile, at length, played around his mouth, and in his usual quiet tone, he said,

"Well, my friend, if you will permit me to

use the phrase—for he who saves another's life, be he prince or peasant, is at least a friend—I think that I can help you in this matter."

"You!" said the Lord Warden, in accents of astonishment, to which no punctuation would do justice.

"Yes—I."

"A pedlar!"

"Give to all distinguished professions their proper designation. My friend Willie Trummell below would say a 'merchant.'"

"Call yourself by what name you will," was the contemptuous reply, "a Venice mechanical—one living by the sale of brooches, and jewellery, and such like follies."

"Even so."

"He is mad," muttered the Warden. "He must be mad. That wound from the scuffle on the Moor, must have been deadlier than I dreamt of—and needs have affected his brain."

"No, my Lord," said the Signor Octavio, laughing, "I am sane—sane as you are."

"Nay then," said Buccleugh, still talking to

himself. "He must be a sorcerer. Gowrie ever said at Padua, that there were means by which men could acquire power over the elements, but I believed him not."

"You did wisely; for it has been whispered to me, that the Earl's studies in magic are like to be dangerous. But to our business. What I said, was said in all soberness? How call you this maiden—her for whom you would have fought?"

The question, simple as it was, brought the colour to the Lord Warden's cheeks, and it was with a voice somewhat agitated, that he replied,

"Mistress Mary Ker."

The Italian repeated the words slowly, as if he wished to impress them on his memory.

"So far," said he, "I am perfect in my lesson: and now to have a distinct idea of my task. You wish that this Mistress Ker should be freed from the persecution of the Envoy of England."

Buccleugh gave a sign of assent.

"It is well. She shall be so."

Notwithstanding the tone of confidence, in which the words were uttered, the young noble could not help regarding his companion with an expression of incredulity.

The Signor Octavio remarked the glance, and interpreted it justly.

"You doubt," said he. "You need not. What I say is true—true as Holy Writ."

"And will she—Mistress Ker I mean, be really free?"

"Free as maiden can be. Free as you are."

"But when? Now?"

"The Ides of March are not yet come."

"And do they approach?"

"To-morrow, when the bells of St. Michael chime mid-day, be here, and you shall learn."

"Yet answer me this—"

"Nay," said the Italian interrupting him with a smile, "answer me. Is there not a Masque at the palace to night?"

"There is."

"And you go there?"

"I do."

"Then we shall meet again."

And ere his purpose could be anticipated, the Signor Octavio with his usual quiet step, had left the room.

Scarcely was he departed when Buccleugh, restless with anxiety, hurried after him, for the purpose of eliciting, if possible, some details of his intended plans. But the delay, short as it was, was sufficient to defeat his object. The chamber of the Italian was empty, and on making further enquiries of the domestics, he learned that his guest had taken his cloak and hat, and gone forth suddenly.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COURT MASQUE.

THERE are few sensations more painful than gazing on the ruins of the Palaces of the past. One can scarce realize to one's self, that the bare and moss covered walls, the shattered windows, the broken pavement, the damp and chilly atmosphere, the death-like silence—where the whoop of the owl, or the bat's flapping wing, are the only sounds that break upon the ear—were once rich in lights, and banners, and tapestry; were once the scenes of festivity and mirth; where the great and wise met in council on the fate of kingdoms; and the young and beautiful mixed in the dance, or listened to the whispers

of love. What history places before us in so life-like fashion, the realities of past greatness? What homily wins our hearts so thoroughly to the conviction of the truth of the words of the inspired King of Israel, that all is vanity?

Such are the feelings, with which the traveller contemplates the Parliament Hall of the Stuarts —the state room of the Palace of Linlithgow. It is situated to the eastward, on the right hand as one enters the court-yard, and irresistibly attracts the eye, even in decay. Its pointed and pendant roof, which rivalled in beauty that of the hall of Rufus, is indeed gone. But its noble dimensions—its colonnaded fire-place—its gallery over the door-way, for the accommodation of the minstrels—the arched recesses of its side walls, appropriated to the reception of spectators—the massive mullions of its windows —the rich tracery of its sculptured niches—all bear evidence of its former glory.

In this apartment, then in the zenith of its splendour, and on the night in question, was to be represented what was termed a Court Masque.

It was a gorgeous, yet clumsy pageant; one of those dramas which had superseded the Mysteries, or Bible plays in popular favour, but which, though their dancing-nymphs, and rude satyrs, gross buffoons and Arcadian shepherds, castles on wheels, and groves of real timber, shadowed forth the scenery and action of the modern stage, would have done little to content any accustomed to its magnificence.

Such as the Masque was, however, its glories were sufficient for the times, and the immense room was now filled by a gay crowd, eager to assist in the representation, or to witness and applaud it.

The Lord Warden was not among the number. He, as yet, lingered in the solitude of his own apartment. To say the truth, he was little in a mood for gaiety. Since the interview of the morning, he had seen nothing of the Italian. Nor, though he had employed some of his most quick-witted retainers for the purpose, could he learn any thing of his movements. In a town so small as Linlithgow, the discovery of a stranger's whereabouts was, apparently, an easy

task ; but simple, as it seemed, Octavio Baldi, as if he had expected, or dreaded the search, had been able to disappoint it. It was mysterious enough ; but every thing about the man savoured of mystery. His apparently low position, and his consummate knowledge ; his coarse dress, and lofty bearing ; his general humility of language, and occasional pretensions to great influence ;—were all contradictory.

Sometimes Buccleugh, as he pondered on the subject, and recollected the intimacy with the intrigues past, or in action, at the English and Scotch Courts, which his guest had occasionally displayed, could scarce resist the belief that he was an Englishman. But the suspicion vanished on reflection. The Lord Warden, had been long enough resident beyond the Alps, if not to speak the soft tongue of the South, with the ease and facility of a native, at least to be able to note and appreciate these gifts in another ; and as the conversation between the new friends, had been for the most part, carried on in Italian, he was forced to confess to himself, that the Signor might have been a Floren-

tine, in the selection of his words, and a Roman in their pronunciation.

And then there were besides, a thousand circumstances which lent their aid to strengthen the belief, that the man was what he affected to be. His minute acquaintance with Florence, and Venice, and Padua, and the other cities beyond the Mountains—his life-like sketches of their leading dignitaries, not only in their features and person, but in their peculiarities of dress and bearing—his intimacy, too, with the scandals and gossip of their social life, as well as with the policy which guided, or was supposed to guide their several governments—all satisfied the Lord Warden, that one so thoroughly master of his subject, must be a native of the localities which he knew so well. And yet, it was precisely because he was thus conversant with the Courts of Queen Elizabeth and King James, that he had originally mistrusted him. What was he to think? The Signor Octavio might be, as he said, an Italian. But he might be also an Englishman, a Frenchman, or a German, for the dialects of all these countries

were spoken by him with equal purity, and his acquaintance with their intrigues, public and private, was equally accurate and universal.

The man was then a mystery; and mysteries ever suggest distrust. He might possess the power he intimated, when he proclaimed his ability to free Mary Ker from the lot to which the avarice of the King, and the weakness or the vices of Anne of Denmark, had condemned her. But would he use it? Nay, more, would he use it in time? The marriage might be hurried on by the apprehensions of Bowes, and a few hours assure Mary's misery, beyond the reach of future aid. What would not the Lord Warden have given to learn how his guest was employing the valuable moments, or what efforts he was making, to keep the promise he had offered.

Such had been the thoughts which ever since the eventful interview had occupied Buccleugh. As the weary hours crept by, day merged into twilight, and twilight into darkness, but still he stirred not from his chamber, in the faint hope that the Italian might return. At length, the clock of St Michael's struck eight.

"Ha!" said he, as the clang of its hammers boomed heavily through the night air. "It is late, and I must to the palace. By the way, he asked of my intended presence at the Masque. Was it there, and not here, he meant that we should meet? The madman! knows he not, that admission to the great Hall is denied to all but the high born and the noble. And yet, it may be, that he keep pledge, better than I dream of. He may be awaiting me at the gate. I will forth then, and at once."

He started to his feet as he spoke, made a hasty toilet, and preceded by four pages, bearing torches, and followed by a long train of his trusty Borderers, the Lord Warden, with a heavy heart, took his way to the scene of regal festivity.

The Masque was over. The Queen, who had supported one of the characters of its ballet, had resumed her seat on the dais, at the upper end of the apartment, and now listened with no ungratified ear, to the compliments of the Spanish Ambassador, on her performance. For the dance was the delight of Anne's life. She never ap-

peared to greater advantage than in its mazes; and, consequently, was ever ready to assist in the superintendance, or the representation of those expensive melodrames, which were the fashion of the day; and which, if they drained King James' exchequer, ministered largely to the coquetry and vanity of his royal Consort. The minister of Philip knew the weakness well; and as he poured his flattery into the royal ear, the cheek coloured and the bosom rose; and schemes of power, and threats of vengeance, the letters of Lord Gowrie, and the menaces of the English Ambassador, were alike forgotten.

Nor were the other occupants of the chamber less agreeably employed. Cavaliers ruffled in silks and velvets. Ladies looked admiration and affected indifference. The Burghers of Linlithgow, their wives, and daughters crowded the galleries—the projecting banners drooped gracefully from the walls—the minstrels blew a gay note—"and all went merry as a marriage bell."

It was at this moment, that Buccleugh entered. His first glance was addressed to the dais.

Mary was not there. Beneath the canopy and behind the royal chair, stood Lady Beatrice Ruthven, and two other of the royal maidens. The fourth was absent; and Buccleugh felt relieved at the thought, that the sorrowing girl had not been forced by Court etiquette, to be present at a scene so little in consonance with her feelings. A second time, his glance wandered round the room. The search was not long in vain. Leaning against the wall, with his arms folded, stood Bowes. Occasionally, his eye glanced at Anne of Denmark, and a shade of something like contempt flitted across his features, but otherwise, there was nothing to tell of the thoughts that passed within.

Once more the Lord Warden resumed his scrutiny, but it was this time without result; Octavio Baldi was not present. Again and again did he thread the dense mass round him, in the hope of discovering, in some obscure nook, his absent guest. Again and again, did he cast an eager look at each one that entered or left the hall. The search was fruitless.

"It is as I suspected," muttered he, to him-

self. "Fool, madman, that I was, to trust him. If he keep tryst to-morrow, as he keeps it to-night, farewell to my last hope for that poor girl's safety. God help her," said he, as his eye once more rested upon Bowes, "with such a companion for life as that, what can she expect but misery. But what boots it remaining here? I will home. The music, and the dancing, and the mirth jar upon my ear."

He made his way to the door, and was about to pass out, when his steps, at once, became riveted to the spot, for there, entering from the anti-chamber, was Bernard Lindsay, the gentleman usher to the Queen, and following close upon his steps, came the Italian.

For a moment, the young noble's breath came thick, and to support himself, he leant against the wall. In another, he hurried forward, with the intention of addressing his guest. But the conference was evidently unwelcome, for the Signor Octavio looked at him, with the cold calm eye, of one that knew him not; and without pausing to await the questions about to be

addressed to him, with a self-possessed air, followed his guide.

In the meantime, the gentleman usher approached the Queen, and said a few words to her in a low tone.

"What, Bernard," was the eager reply. "A jewel merchant from Venice, did you say? To what good fortune am I indebted for such happiness? Have him in, man—present him at once. They tell me, that compared with the exquisite devices of those workmen of the South, the carcanets of George Heriot are rude and tasteless."

The usher acted upon the given permission, and turning round with the formal courtesy of his craft, introduced to the royal notice the Signor Octavio, while dame and damsel, cavalier and knight—for the object of his appearance had circulated like wild fire—bent their eager eyes on the new comer.

The position was a trying one even for an experienced courtier, but the Italian seemed wonderfully little affected by it. Yet he had

evidently prepared himself with care, for appearing to advantage. His dress was plain; but the materials were of black velvet, the falling ruff of the richest lace. The handle of his long rapier, if simple in its form, and without ornament, was exquisite alike in its taste and finish —and he knelt before Anne of Denmark with the easy self-possessed manner of a man to whom court ceremonials and their usages were familiar, dropping gracefully upon one knee, and presenting, at the same time, to the Queen, a small coffer, which he had taken from beneath his cloak.

Anne eagerly opened it, and a cry of delight escaped her.

"Look here—Don Diego! saw ye ever such gems—such taste—such workmanship?" And the buzz of admiration which burst from female lips, as each fair head strained forward to catch a glimpse of the contents of the casket, bore ample testimony to the justice of the Queen's eulogiums, and drew every eye to the scene of the dais, and its chief actor.

Among those whose attention was attracted to the spot, were Bowes and the King. The first recognized, in a moment, the mysterious companion of his ride. The other, who had been, as usual, shambling about the room, addressing each guest in turn, with that easy familiarity and unaffected good nature, which secured to him his subjects liking, even when it failed to shield him from their contempt, turned at once to the spot which offered to his ever craving passion for novelty a new object;—and both hurried towards the dais.

"Gude guide us!" said his Majesty, who had been first in the race, undeterred by that necessity for keeping up appearances, which regulated the movements of his companion. "What's the steer about? and what's this o't?" continued he, as he snatched the casket from the Queen's hand, "A' the gowd of Ophir in a box? Where gat ye thae bonny dies? and what are ye seeking for 'em?"

The Italian answered the question, by a respectful obeisance.

"The jewels, your Majesty," said he, "are my master's, and are not for sale."

"Your Maister! wha's he?"

"A goldsmith, Sire—one with establishments in Florence, and at Venice. These chains are Venetian, and I, an adopted son of the Signory, am entrusted to carry the goods through Europe as a pattern, that I may obtain orders."

"I'll buy a' that's in his shop; and in course frae a King you'll no be expectin' the siller in hand. Ye'll nae doubt gie lang credit?"

"I fear, Sire, that is impossible. My country is a Republic, and its citizens have not the respect for sovereigns which they ought to have."

"Weel, weel! If ye maun hae the ready, I'll bid ye a price for 'em. I hae three hundred and twenty merks in my pouch. Wull ye tak it?"

"Impossible, Sire. It amounts not to half the value of one."

"I'll hae this ane ony gate," said the King, seizing hold of the jewel case, and selecting a

gold chain studded with diamonds which appeared to strike his fancy.

"I repeat, Sire, it is impossible."

"Hout! that's ay the word wi' you packmen-folk. But the siller in hand gars ye sing anither sang. So I'll see if I canna' borrow, on thae bonny dies, frae some of the gay billies here."

And without leave, asked or obtained, he shambled off with the jewel case and its contents, in the Quixotic hope of gathering from the pockets of his guests, funds sufficient for their purchase.

The Italian followed his movements with a somewhat anxious eye.

The Queen remarked the glance, and hastened to relieve him.

"Have no fears, Sir Merchant," said she. "Your jewels will be restored to you. But are they all you possess? Does that southern land of yours produce nought else to charm one's eye but its jewellery?"

"Nay, Madam, Venice is the country of the painter, as well as of the goldsmith. Fair

dames long occasionally for portraits of those they love—and from time to time our first artists execute 'pictures in little' for bosom or for wrist."

The words were simple, yet they seemed to have struck some secret chord, for the Queen coloured, and, for a moment, was silent, as if from embarrassment.

"And who," said she, at length, in a slightly fluttered tone, "are the happy beings to whom the Gods have given the power of annihilating time and space, and enabling us to call up before our eyes at will, the objects of our affection."

"Madam, there have been many such; but I spoke not of the dead. Of the living, the most honoured is Bassano."

The agitation of the Queen appeared to increase, for eyelid quivered, and bosom heaved, and for an instant, she sank back in her chair, as if under the influence of some dear and suddenly recalled memory.

She spoke, at length, but the tone was low, and the words scarcely reached the Italian's ear.

"I have heard of the man, and that he was great in his art."

"Not great, Madam, but divine. For he, beneath whose pencil, form and feature start into existence as real as in life, creates—and to create, is the attribute of Divinity."

"And have you any such specimens of art?"

"Madam, but one."

"I would fain look on it."

"It is impossible."

"And why?"

"Because, in other years, I presented one such—the workmanship of the incomparable master—to the eyes of a lady in my own land."

"And where was the evil of that?"

"Nothing in the act, but much in its consequences."

"But again, I pray you wherefore?"

"Madam, it is said, that in her spring-time of life, she had loved a young noble. But he found not favour with her parents, and in spite of the tears and entreaties of their child, they married her to another. But I fear you comprehend me not."

"Well, well," said the Queen, in an agitated tone, and clasping her hands convulsively. "But what had that to do with the picture?"

"Madam, it so chanced, that this youth was of surpassing beauty, and the great master, ever an admirer of the divine form, had painted him often, from his love for the beautiful."

"And this—this picture in little, which you presented to the lady you spoke of, chanced to be his portrait."

"Madam, it was."

"And what said she?" said the Queen, speaking hurriedly. "What did she? What befell of it?"

"Madam, it is a sad tale; and but that you had enforced me to it, I should have been silent. The sight of the one she had loved so well, opened anew the springs of her dried up affections; and she pined, and sickened, and died."

The Queen gazed at him for awhile, as if scarce conscious of his language.

"And, therefore," continued she, after a pause, and in a tone of affected coquetry, as if she hoped by the levity of her manner, to con-

ceal from herself and others, some strong inward feeling, "therefore, in mercy to our susceptibilities, you withhold from ladies' eyes, the pictures of the great master. Fie on you, Sir Italian! My sex is not so feeble as you deem—we Northern dames have stronger nerves and stouter hearts!"

The Signor Octavio, made a slight gesture of dissent.

"Come," said she, "if you doubt my fortitude, I must prove it. I *will* see that picture!"

"Madam, it may be dangerous."

"I will face the peril."

"The curiosity of our first mother lost Paradise."

"So will not mine."

"You have been warned in time."

"I am so; but what dread you?"

"It may be with you, as with the lady I spoke of."

"Nay, if you entertain such a thought, the matter concerns my honour, and I insist."

The words were spoken bravely, though the

trembling eyelid, and quivering mouth, gave contradiction to her language. But the curiosity seemed even stronger than the terror; for ordering her attendants to remove to a distance from her, she again, and in terms more urgent than before, demanded the production of the portrait.

"I resist no longer, Madam," said the Italian. "You are a Queen and must be obeyed."

With the words, he took from the breast of his doublet, a small case of morocco leather, and respectfully placed it in the Queen's hands.

Anne eagerly opened it, but a single glance at its contents was sufficient, for she let it drop to the ground, and with an hysterical shriek, which rang through chamber and vaulted roof, fell back fainting in her chair.

CHAPTER IX.

THE JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON.

In the sixteenth century, the belief in magic was universal throughout Europe. The human mind had been but lately awakened from the torpor, which had overwhelmed it during the middle ages; and as the eye, when suddenly dragged from darkness to light, has its first efforts at vision troubled and uncertain; so the mental faculties, exposed without preparation to that blaze of intellectual light, which burst on them from the first labours of the printing press, became naturally overwhelmed by the brilliancy and variety of their new treasures, and thus

not unfrequently mistook the abstract for the practical—the visionary for the true.

Yet, if Knowledge were vague, its indistinctness in no degree affected the faith or zeal of its new worshippers. On the contrary, in the moral as in the physical world, objects borrow additional grandeur from the veiling of their outlines; and men, for the first time conscious of powers of which they saw not the limits, believed them to be illimitable. Like the rebel angels of old, they fancied themselves Gods.

The natural consequence was a desire to usurp those agencies, which belong exclusively to Divinity. Science claimed for itself the power of extracting from the crucible the germs of youth—of reading in the planets the fortunes of a life—and most of all, of forcing by spell and incantation, the spirits of earth and air to do its bidding.

The doctrine was too flattering to human vanity not to become popular, and the study of magic or the Black Art, as it was termed, grew universal. Pope and Prince, Catholic and Protestant, alike wasted the midnight oil in the

investigation of its mysteries, and even Catherine de Medicis, Burleigh, and the Regent Murray—the first among the Intelligences of the time, lent themselves to the delusion.

If such were the fears of the brave, and the follies of the wise, it may be easily understood how absolute was the fanaticism of the lower classes; under the double influence of the example of their superiors, and their greater credulity. The feeling strengthened with its indulgence. By degrees, the Prince of Darkness was regarded as the God of this world; and where the poetical temperament was strong, and the powers of reasoning weak, it became convenient alike for the dreamer and the sage, to refer whatever was extraordinary or inexplicable to his agency; or to the agency of those, who, through the secrets of the Cabala, more powerful than himself, could demand and enforce his aid.

James VI, his court and his people, were not above the prejudices of the times. The northern population was essentially imaginative, and accepted, without difficulty, a creed of which imagination was the first element; while the

King himself was not less disposed to look with favour upon a mysticism, which ministered unconsciously to the Royal vanity, by giving occasion for the exhibition of that superior wisdom, on which James especially prided himself.

With such a predisposition towards the marvellous, it may be easily understood what effect was produced on the spectators, by the events recorded in the last chapter; and how instantaneously the idea suggested itself to every mind, that the illness of the Queen, so sudden and otherwise so incomprehensible, had been produced by the magic arts of the Italian—a deduction the more easily arrived at, as the enjoined absence of her immediate attendants, prior to the catastrophe, was evidence of mystery, and suggested evil. At the moment when the interview between Anne and the Signor Octavio had been brought so suddenly and inauspiciously to a close, James was at some little distance, employed as usual, in familiar gossip with his courtiers. But the scream which burst from those in the neighbourhood of the royal chair, instantly

arrested his attention, and he hurried to the spot.

"What's this o't, bairns? What's this o't?" cried he, as he shambled towards the dais. "What are ye skirling for that gait? What ails ye?"

"A warlock! A warlock!" answered a hundred voices in chorus.

"Michty me, but that's awfu'! Wha is't?" and breaking through the crowd, he found himself in the presence of the Italian. On him, indeed, every eye was bent, to him every finger was pointed; but the fears of the spectators were stronger than their anger, and he still stood alone and unharmed, as if in the midst of a charmed circle, which the King himself, however confident in the immunity of monarchs from the penalties which attach themselves to ordinary mortals, seemed little disposed to intrude on.

"The Venice packman, as I am a crowned King!" said the Majesty of Scotland, as he shuffled the jewel casket into the hands of his attendant, Davy, with a hurried injunction to

take care of its contents. "And now, bairns," continued he, turning to the crowd around him. "Tell us a' about it? How chanced it? What did he? I dinna smell brimstone."

"The pictur! The pictur!" once more responded in chorus, the voices of the courtly mob.

"A pictur! what did he wi' it?"

As before, the excited auditory replied in one voice.

"He showed it to the Queen, and she fainted."

"And whar is't now?"

"In his pouch."

And the obedient fingers of the spectators, as if under the influence of a common agency, changed slightly their direction, and pointed to the pocket, from which the Signor Octavio had drawn the miniature case, and to which he had returned it, when it dropped from the Queen's hand.

"It will be auld Clootie's likeness," muttered James to himself, as he advanced, keeping always, however, at a respectful distance from the Italian, and describing a circle round him, in the same cautious fashion, as he would have

approached an adder in the grass. "Yes, it will, nae doubt," continued he aloud, "be the representation of the Prince o' Darkness. But it's no dacent for a Christian King to be lookin' at siccan a' thing: sae we'll just let it be. Howbeit, that's nae reason though, that this agent of the Evil Ane should na get his paiks, for castin' the glamour ower our royal Consort. Sae grip him lads.—Seize him instantly! In our presence warlocks are powerless. There is a diveenity about a King, that awes even the deevils."

The crowd seemed but little disposed, at first, to put implicit confidence in his Majesty's powers of guardianship. But, at length, moved partly by the fact, that James, notwithstanding the hostility expressed by his language, remained unharmed, and probably still more by the inoffensive bearing of the Italian, some of those in his neighbourhood ventured to touch him. And as the earth neither swallowed up the assailants of the sorcerer, nor did he himself, by word, spell, or movement, offer opposition, he was soon overwhelmed by a host of

guardians, who in their anxiety to prove their new born zeal, could scarcely be restrained from offering him personal injury.

"Na—na—bairns," said the Monarch. "Do him nae harm. A chield like that, maun be dealt wi' after anither fashion. If this had been a mere civil offence, he maun have tholed an assize, but the Fifteen are no competent to handle an affair o' this magnitude. Magic is no a thing o' man's hands, sic as reiving or spulzeing, but o' the speerits o' earth and air, and requires sic a divine intelligence as has been said, by universal voice and acclamation, (the Lord keep us humble), to reside in oursel'. So, as Solomon did at an orra time, reserve to himsel' maitters whilk were aboon the comprehension of the ordinary judges of the land, will we, on the present occasion, having a due consideration for the speeritual safety, as weel as the temporal prosperity of our subjects, place ourselves in the judgment seat."

The object of the judicial proceedings had hitherto regarded them with no other feeling than amazement, but from the gloomy and

menacing looks of those around him, he began to suspect, for the first time, that what, in the commencement, he had looked on as a piece of mere Court buffoonery, was like to prove a tragedy; and he determined energetically to interfere in his own behalf.

"Is this serious?" said he, in a calm haughty tone, "or does your Majesty amuse yourself?"

"Amuse! quotha," replied the King. "My certie lad, if ye think it amusing, ye like to sup your brose het."

"But I would remind you, that I am not amenable to your jurisdiction."

"The mair reason for ye to respect the laws of the kingdom ye visit."

"But I am the subject of a powerful state—and it will seek heavy compensation for any evil done me."

"Let it," said King James coldly. "It's a far cry to Loch Awe."

"But he's a friend of mine," broke in the Lord Warden, who had hitherto been surveying the scene with astonishment, and could no

longer resist interfering in favour of his new ally. "I will be answerable for him."

"You answer for him, Buccleugh!" said the King, in a dry satirical tone. "Nae doubt. You Branksome folk are a' tarred with the same stick. Your grandsire's wife, Janet Beatown, was weel kenned for her practice of the black art; and is it not notour, that your gude father, the Earl of Bothwell, conspired against our life, wi' that wizardly woman and sorceress, Annis Simpson. Answer for him! quotha. Answer for yoursel', say I."

The King's words seemed to have called up painful recollections in the Lord Warden, for he remained silent, and the Italian was once more compelled to make an effort in his own favour.

"Your Majesty," said he, in the same cold haughty tone as before, "seems determined to give to this buffoonery the character of a judicial proceeding. Be it so. I accept the ground your Majesty has selected. You have judges in this country. You have, I have been informed, juries. I demand to be placed before

them, and made acquainted with my offence, and the evidence of it."

"Ye hae been informed of mony things, freend," said James in a complacent tone. "But there's nae knowledge perfect, except it may be in a rank, sae high, that the minds o' packmen canna be expected to attain thereunto. But I wad hae ye ken, that in this our Kingdom o' Scotland, when a thief is ta'en in the red hand, as we say—in the very act, as ye wad phrase it—we need neither judge nor jury, but punish him on the spot. If the case be sae, in the abstractin' o' a wheen bawbees, how muckle mair when the thing stown is the mind—the speerit—the vara essence. But if ye seek justice, ye shall no have to complain o' wantin' it; pairtly out o' respect for that divine attribute, and the mair especially, because a' your earthly goods, and thae bonny gowd chains o' yours will be escheated to the Crown, in case of condemnation. So as I wuss to put it out o' the power o' ony man to say, that I was swayed by my ain interests in the decision, and moreover as St. Louis—a King wha, though

he had been at the Holy Land, I count na to hae been sae weel imbued with the rael doctrine of Scriptur as mysel', seeing he was blinded by the errors of Papistry—judged his people—I with equal justice will judge you."

He turned as he spoke, and gave some instructions to Fowler. They were instantly obeyed; for the favourite had learned from Bowes, during the bustle, his suspicions of the Italian, and he zealously acted upon orders calculated to remove a stumbling block from his patron's path. Accordingly, two benches were hurriedly taken from the side walls, and placed opposite the dais—one on either side of the royal chair. To these, by the energy of the same active agent, were conducted fifteen of the male spectators; but rather unwillingly, as the impressed Areopagites had a sort of indistinct idea, that their aiding and abetting, might at a future day, be remembered to their disadvantage, by some brother sorcerer. Between them, and in front of the royal chair, was placed the prisoner, and James, taking his seat with what dignity he could, prepared to open the

proceedings; while behind stood his venerable attendant David Moyse, somewhat bewildered by the scene before him, in which the prejudices inculcated by education, were brought so violently into collision with his shrewd observation, and strong practical common sense.

And what, in the mean time, had been the fate of the unfortunate Queen? To say the truth, she had been forgotten. The intense superstition of the spectators—the apparently undoubted act of magic—the seizure—the trial —and the probable fate of the prisoner—had all occupied those present so entirely, that not a thought had been wasted on the unhappy cause of it. Lady Beatrice alone knelt by her Majesty's chair, and by chafing her hands, endeavoured to recall her to existence, but as yet without success. The shock had been too violent for its effects to pass easily away. And Anne of Denmark still lay on her seat speechless and insensible.

In the meantime, preparations for the trial went on. The unwilling jurymen took their

places, and the Italian was placed opposite the throne; while James, fidgeting in his seat, surveyed the preparations with intense delight.

"Eh! Davy, man," said he to his attendant behind. "It's just grand. Look round ye. Does na this put ye in mind of the scene at Carthage? Div ye observe the attention? Div ye mark the expectancy in the faces? *Conticuere omnes*, ye ken." And with the words, the 'Pius Æneas' of Linlithgow addressed his auditory.

"Barons and knights," said he. "It is within your knowledge, that the Speerit o' darkness, wha is indifferently called Satanas, and Beelzebub, and Apollyon, or as we should say, Deil—whilk, though a word in common acceptance wi' the *profanum vulgus*, is natheless of a classical parentage and descent, being clearly derived frae the Latin *Diabolus*, whilk is but another version o' the Greek *Diabolos*, whilk is deduced frae *Diaballo*, whilk—but I will reserve shewing ye its connexion with the Evil Ane, till a mair convanient season. This Speerit o'

darkness then, ever lays snares for the souls of God's people, and for that end, has made compacts with ungodly men, and mair especially, ungodly women; whilk, considering the weakness of their sex, and their faceelity in being led awa' by evil persuasions, as is evidenced by Eve in Paradise—though how she could have sold the warld for an apple, is a maitter that I never could exactly understand, seeing that there were, nae doubt, better fruits in the garden; such as the Jargonelle pear, or Orleans plum, without enumerating peaches, or grapes, or pomegranates, and other products of auspicious climes, whilk, as beyond a question, the Garden of Eden's was. But to return. The Deil having thus seduced evil men and evil women—of which latter, I may avert that the Fife witches are the maist notour, being held universally of a mair satanic and diabolical nature than the others;—my uncle, the Earl of Murray, late Regent, published an Edict, '*in tales maleficos*,' as he phrased it, condemning a' such taken in witchcraft, to be burnt at the Cross. Yet, notwithstanding, it is acknowledged that the

said practice has existed, and doth exist, largely in this kingdom, of which—without adverting to the Lord Lyon, king-at-arms, and other famous examples—ye hae now presented to ye a notable instance. Weel, ye hae seen the act, and the actor. Ye hae the *corpus delicti*, and the body o' the prisoner baith afore ye. What say ye? Is the panel guilty, or not guilty?"

"Guilty of a capital punishment," was the reply.

"Weel! Weel! That's gieing me, mair than I asked for. But I doubt na' but ye meant weel. Ye find him guilty. That's clear eneugh."

A hum of assent was the reply.

"Just that. Sae I'll now to the judgment o' assize."

But his Majesty's eloquence was arrested in its course. Slowly, but gradually, the Queen's senses had returned to her, and her eyes became conscious of outward objects. At first indeed, though the actors of the pageant were before her, she was insensible alike of their intentions and their language; but by degrees, the painful

scene, forced itself upon her attention. With the sight of the jewel merchant, came back the recollection of the fatal portrait, and the sudden fainting fit that had followed; and the words that now fell upon her ear, communicated to her, that the unhappy Venetian was about to be made the victim of his complaisance. Anxious to free him from the fate that her curiosity had provoked, Anne of Denmark, raised herself up, and with a half shriek, exclaimed: "Oh! do not injure him."

The well meaning attempt was productive of any thing but benefit to the prisoner.

"Hear till her," said the King. "Mark ye, how, puir cretur, she is still warstlin' wi' the Evil Ane. She is my wedded wife, nae doubt; and your Sovereign and lawfu' Queen, and shuld be obeyed in a' things, as is seemly. But noo its no her that's speakin', but the De'il through her lips, wanting, as is natural, to save the life of his agent. So ye need na mind her. If even we oursel, (no' that that's possible) were to fa' into the power o' the Prince of Darkness, ye could na be blamed for disregardin' us, ony

mair than ye wad a puir demented cretur, that has gane clean wud. And sae, I'll noo proceed to judgment."

Unhappily, his Majesty's intentions, were once more destined to be interrupted, and the dignified language in which, no doubt, the decision of the Court would have been conveyed, scattered into thin air; for the prisoner, advancing towards the King, in tones, and with a gesture that almost might have been termed menacing, exclaimed:

"King of Scots, lay but a finger on me, and you will bitterly repent it."

"Eh! Wow!" said James, forgetting his eloquence in his fears. "I doubt but he is ganging to try some o' his incantations on us. Sae be aff with him at ance, lads. It's no' safe taking him as far as the Cross. Ye had better put a lunt till him, at the Water Gate. There is nae saying what cantrips he may practeese, if ye gi'e him time. Sae to the tar-barrel wi' him, and that instantly."

A dozen zealous agents, all anxious to carry out the wishes of their sovereign, flung them-

selves upon the prisoner. But ere they were able to pinion his arms, by a convulsive effort he freed himself from their grasp, and advanced towards the royal chair.

"King of Scots," said he. "Mark me well," and with the words, he raised his right hand in air, opened its fingers, and exclaimed in a clear, distinct voice, "EUREKA," the pass-word of the secret missive—the evidence of the presence of the Envoy, to whom was entrusted the preservation of James's present life—the accession to his future kingdom.

CHAPTER X.

THE LAIRD'S JOCK.

The Italian had escaped from the grasp of his captors, but it was only for the moment. In another instant, his guards had re-possessed themselves of their prisoner, and each eye now turned towards the King, as if to gather the effect of the apparent violence on his Majesty, or in expectation of further orders.

James had none to give. On him the words or the gesture of the Venetian seemed to have produced results little less startling than the exhibition of the portrait on the Queen; for he lay back in his chair—his eyes, as was usual when excited, rolling—his tongue projecting

from his mouth—his fingers grasping the arms of his seat—and the whole outward man exhibiting intense and overwhelming astonishment.

"His Highness is bewitched," was the universal cry. "Awa wi the Warlock. To the little Cross with him—and haud him fast—or he'll be aff on a broomstick."

With the words, the eager crowd commenced dragging the supposed votary of the Black Art from the room, unchecked by any effort of the King, who sat gazing at them, as if the greatness of his surprise had stupified him too thoroughly to enable him to estimate the importance of their movements.

His 'Fidus Achates,' however, David Moyse, was more on the alert. He, as well as James, had at once recognised the pass-word, and more self-possessed than his master, was less disposed to view with philosophy, the proceedings of the courtiers.

"What are ye glowrin' at?" said he to the Majesty of Scotland. "Ye were as yald as a Soople—Tam the day, when ye were lowping

after the puggy; and noo, when they're taking awa, it may be, your best freend, frae ye—ye keep sitting there looking as daized as a houlet, that has been a' night in a dookit. Be aff after him I tell ye, and save him."

And he accompanied his exhortation by a shove on the shoulder, which, if energetic enough, nearly to land his august Master upon his nose, had at least the advantage of dispelling his stupor, and sending him with the impetus of a catapult, in the track of his too zealous subjects.

"Hooly, Hooly, lads," said the King. "Haud your hands, ye gowks. Ye're a' wrang. He's no a Warlock. He's an honest lad; ane of my maist parteeklar freends;—a rael, worthy and trusty ally:"—and to give effect to his exhortations, he laid violent hold of the Venetian, and did his best to arrest his steps.

His efforts were not destined to be successful. The avowal of his new-born friendship for the man he had but a few minutes back condemned to death,—the fearful contortions of his countenance, for James's internal storm of eloquence

and the immense size of his tongue; were engaged in a desperate struggle for the mastery —all satisfied the superstitious crowd that their monarch, like his Consort, had fallen a victim to the arts of the sorceror.

Nor did his oratory, even when it chanced to be intelligible, awaken any feeling of sympathy for the victim of popular fury. But a few minutes before, they had had the authority of the learned Sovereign himself, while as yet undeniably in the possession of his senses, that those who were subjected to the Evil One, lost all power of self-volition, and uttered but the words which the Demon of darkness put into their mouths. The only result, therefore, of his Majesty's exertions, was to inspire his subjects with a more determined zeal to disregard his express wishes, and hurry the magician to his fate; in the hope that the extinction of the power that caused the calamity, might have the effect of restoring their beloved Monarch to sanity. Struggling, fighting, shouting, screaming, they had already passed through the door of the great hall, made their way down the

stairs, and reached the court-yard, when a new element mixed itself in the fray, and arrested their progress.

This was the armed attendants of the Lord Warden.

Buccleugh himself was not free from the prejudices of the times, and might, under other circumstances, have attached faith to the charges made against his new ally; but the words that had dropped from the Italian in their interview at his own chamber, had led him to hope, however faintly, that the Signor Octavio possessed some secret interest over the King and Queen. He had, therefore, to a certain degree been prepared for its exercise, and had reviewed the preceding scene rather with astonishment than terror. Moreover, believing as he did, that his new friend had been involved in present danger, from a desire to aid his wishes for the protection of Mary Ker, he was determined to incur every risk, rather than abandon him to his fate.

How that safety was to be assured, was, however, a matter which as yet presented itself

in no distinct form, and it was only when upon reaching the court-yard, his eye fell upon some half dozen of his personal retainers, that he conceived the idea of making them aid in the rescue. It was instantly acted on.

"Jock," said he, to his henchman, or chief attendant, a gigantic young Borderer, who lounged near the door in expectation of the presence of his chief, "Draw if ye be true man; and for God's sake get the lads together, for its a jeopardy."

His clansman scarce needed the bidding. In one instant, his eye had caught his chieftains disordered attire—the torn doublet—the tattered ruff—the plumeless hat—for, in his anxiety to save his friend, Buccleugh had been roughly handled in the scuffle—all spoke of instant danger.

"Gude guide us!" was the reply, "what's this o't?" and springing forward, he instantly drew his sword, and at the same moment gave a long loud whistle of a peculiar intonation, which echoed by hall and archway, tower and bartizan, made itself distinctly heard by every

one in the crowded court-yard. The shrill notes seemed to be instantly understood, for ere they were well uttered, from a dozen different quarters came the cries of "a Scott! a Scott! Liddesdale! Liddesdale! — ride for Branksome," and some forty or fifty spearmen forcing themselves with the speed of light, through the groups that peopled the inner area of the palace, made their way to the door where James and his subjects still struggled for the possession of the prisoner.

Their presence was instantly signified to their master, by the henchman.

"Here are the lads, Laird. — What want ye?"

"Circle in the King, men. Circle in the King, and the stranger in the black velvet doublet. But be canny. Be canny, I say, and nae blood shed."

In an instant, the orders were obeyed. The sturdy Borderers forced their way through the mob of silken-doubleted courtiers, with the same ease as a stag brushes through the mountain fern, and removing without difficulty, (for

their armed appearance had somewhat cooled the zeal of the "Warlock" burners) those who had possession of the Venetian, they enclosed within their iron circle, the Lord Warden and the parties whom he had commended to their protection—the King and the Italian. To these must be added David Moyse, who had stuck close to his master, and who had been allowed, by the new comers, to remain by his side, probably because his age and appearance satisfied them that he might be admitted without danger within their ranks. In the first instance, the Royal party had been somewhat pressed on by their defenders; but, as the crowd fell back, in obedience to the sign of their officer they gradually enlarged the circle. The lances, which had been originally held upwards, assumed a more horizontal direction. The points were lowered, the butt-ends placed upon the ground,—each kept in a fixed position by the pressure of the right foot of him who carried it,—and the armed band assumed that attitude of defence, which use had made familiar to them, and which, (formed on the

model of the Macedonian phalanx,) had enabled them, in common with the Swiss Mountaineers, and the German Lanzknechts to set at defiance the first chivalry of Europe.

No sooner was breathing room obtained, than Buccleugh dropped upon one knee, and addressing the King, expressed the hope that his Majesty had not suffered in the scuffle, and that he would pardon his having infringed on the law which forbade the use of weapons within the precincts of the Court.

"Pardon ye, man," said James, at length, after several vain efforts to articulate, "I'll forgie ye a' the sins that ye ever did, or ever may commit. My certie, thae reivers of yours are handy wi' their tools, and I'll look for the rest o' my life wi' mair liking on a sax-ell-lance, than I ever thought to do. But, hech, Sirs, I'm sair fore-fochten."

"Hout!" said Davy, "a glass of Canary will set ye a' to rights."

"That's true, and I'll back to the Canary; but first and foremost, I maun make an oration. Listen to me," continued he, addressing himself

to the crest-fallen courtiers. "Ye gowks, ye gomerils, ye misleared villains, ye! Listen, I say, and tak tent to my words. Dinna think to judge o' a sorcerer again. Sic knowledge belangs only to divecnity, or to crowned kings, like oursel'. And if, out of the superabundance of your vanity, I find ye meddling wi' maitters sae far ayont ye, I'll rax your craigs for ye. And noo, freend," said he, turning to the Venetian, "we'll to our private chaamber, and ye maun alang wi' us. But, first," said he, pointing to the rapier of the Signor Octavio, whose spit-like length, after the fashion of the period, trailed upon the ground, "tak aff that lang sword o' yours, and gie it to some o' Buccleugh's myrmidons, there. It'll come as ready to their hand, as my mouth to a pint stoup. But hear till 'em," continued the King, as he marked by the torch-light, the gay reckless bearing of his new attendants, and there came upon his ear, the low chuckling laugh, which passed from man to man, and which not even the presence of royalty could restrain. "Hear till thae deevil's buckies! Ane wad think, frae their nichering

and daffing, they had been summoned no to a fray, but to a feast. *Beati pacifici*, quotha! I'm doubtin' if that's a text to lippen to in Liddesdale."

James turned as he spoke, and once more bending his steps towards the interior of the palace, made his way to his private chamber, followed by Moyse, and the Italian.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SECRET ENVOY.

The King's first care, on entering the apartment in which he was originally presented to our readers, was to proceed to the flagon of Canary, and refresh himself with repeated draughts. The effect produced upon the Royal spirits seemed to be exhilarating, for his features assumed their usual insouciant expression, and with a satisfied air he flung himself into his easy chair, and turned to his attendant.

"There's nae doubt o't, Davy," said he. "Wine cheereth the heart o' man. That's a doctrine, that a' maun gie in wi'; and if thae Geneva billies, that are ay searching the

Scripturs as they ca' it, searched to purpose, I doubt na that they would find in them mony, sic like, pleasant, passages. But the deil a text will serve their turn, unless it keep blawing and blasting about damnation."

"May be!" said his attendant drily, "but ye're forgetting this merchant here, frae foreign pairts. I'm thinking that he wad rather be fingering his bonny dies again, than hearing your Highness flyting about the minister of the Tolbooth."

"That's no ill thocht on, Davy, sae ye may as weel give him the coffer. And now," said James, as the Italian received the jewel box, and replaced it in an inner pocket of his doublet, "wha's aught ye?"

"I am unfortunate enough not to understand your Majesty."

"Wha's servant are ye, man? Wha sent ye here?"

"This," said the Italian, drawing a letter from the breast of his doublet; "will inform your Majesty."

James grasped the missive, opened it, and

perused it carefully. As he read, his eye sparkled with pleasure.

"And so, said he:—"

But the Royal sentence was not destined to be finished, for his new companion broke in hurriedly.

"Pardon me, Sire, for interrupting you; but my master's orders are stringent. What I have to communicate, I am enjoined to communicate to you alone." And he glanced at the old Gentleman Usher, whose shrewd eye gave evidence of his listening eagerly to the conversation.

"That's true. Sae ye maun gang awa', Davy. Ye see he's jealousin, that ye're ower far ben."

"But Gude be wi' us," said the faithful attendant, without noticing the taunt. "The lad's a stranger, and, may be, no to ride the water wi'."

"Na—na! ye're out there Davy," said the King. "He's a true man, and there's naething to fear, for he has brought letters of credence frae ane I ken o'."

The attendant had nothing left for it, but to obey his master's orders, and withdraw; accompanying his exit by sundry nods of the head,

intended to express that the precautions taken to ensure secresy would only be enforced so long as the Envoy was present to superintend their enforcement.

"And so my freend," continued James, turning to his companion, as the door closed, "ye hae been specially sent here by the Grand Duke of Tuscany."

The Envoy bowed.

"And ye are, I need scarce ask the question, an Italian."

"It would be impossible," said the new comer, with a smile, "to conceal anything from the far seeing intuition of your Majesty. How could the trusted servant of an Italian Prince be any thing but an Italian?"

"Nae doubt—nae doubt, but in siccan a case, we had better continue the conversation in your ain native tongue. Thanks to my natural abeelity, a' languages are alike to me," said James waving his hand in a complacent fashion. "*Signor Ambasciatore, mi ringrazia di viderla.*"

"With your permission, Sire, I should prefer speaking in English."

"Ye dinna mean to insinuate," said the King, with a flushed cheek, "but what I can conduct the conference in Italian."

"To suppose me guilty of such folly, Sire, is cruel. Your Majesty's accent is perfect."

"Ye confess then, that I hae the *Lingua Toscana in bocca Romana*."

"Politian could not have selected the words more happily. Aretine could not have pronounced them with a better emphasis."

"Weel, weel, my freend," said the King, and notwithstanding the compliment, with something of disappointment in his voice. "Hae it as ye will. But I should like to have shewn ye, that we barbarians, (as you folks beyond the Alps, in your ignorance, hae the presumption to ca' us inhabitants of distant lands), are as thoroughly imbued with the Literae Humaniores as yoursel'. But since ye desire that we are to conduct the conversation in English, I'll no deny ye; and the mair sae, as I maun allow,

that considering ye are na a *Terræfilius*, as ane might say, ye speak our language no that ill."

"My mother, Sire, was from England, and that enables me to make myself intelligible; though, of course, I despair of ever arriving at that felicitous selection of phrases, and grace of intonation and delivery, which gives such a charm to the conversation of King James."

"Weel, weel, my freend, I'll no deny what a' admit; and now to your mission."

"My master, Sire, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, is a sincere friend of your Majesty. Attached in early life to your beautiful mother, at that time the Dauphiness of France, he has never ceased to watch your career with almost paternal affection."

"Honest man!" said James, nodding approvingly.

"You are aware, Sire, that—prior to the death of the Grand Duke, his brother—my master was one of the Sacred College; and though, on his accession to the throne, he resigned the Purple, he is still one of the most trusted

friends of the Holy See;—acquainted with its acts—its intentions—its private intrigues—its public policy."

"Nae doubt—though it maun be a sair fash haeing to manage ither folks' business. I find my ain exhausting eneugh, and speaking o' exhaustion, ye may as weel gie us the Canary. It'll help us to listen a' the better to your story."

The Envoy complied, and continued.

"Possessing thus the keys to many secrets, otherwise unguessed at, it has come to his knowledge, that the Vatican has at present a plan on foot, for uniting England and Scotland under one sovereign, and with this end, it has been determined to displace the Queen Elizabeth, and yourself. For that purpose, about eighteen months ago, the physician of the Queen of England—"

"The Jew Lopez?"

"The very man. This Lopez was gained by the Ambassador of Philip, and for a large sum, undertook to communicate poison to her Majesty."

"They hae ta'en his head aff."

"True, Sire. The fact is as you state it. The plot was discovered, and the actor punished. But the Holy See is not discouraged; and my master has learned, that a new attempt is about to be made, of which, not the Queen of England, but your Majesty is to be the victim."

"What's that ye say," said the King, putting down the half emptied wine cup.

"I repeat, Sire, that you are the object of the present plots of the Vatican. Two jesuits have been sent to this country, nominally as chaplains to the Earl of Huntly, but, in fact, for the purpose of poisoning your Majesty."

"Heard ye ever the like o' that?" said James, whose sympathies seemed to have become wonderfully acute, as soon as he discovered, that he himself was likely to be the sufferer. "Heard ye, I say, ever the like o' that? The heart o' man, as the Psalmist hath it, is full o' wickedness."

"But too true, Sire, and therefore, my master, having as I mentioned, an intense, and, as it

were a paternal affection for your Majesty, sent me instantly to advise you of the plot, and to provide you with means of guarding against it. This ring," continued the speaker, "has the singular virtue of warning its wearer of the approach of evil. Its change of colour will intimate when there is danger in the cup. To-morrow I shall have the further honour of delivering from my sovereign, a Venetian wine glass, which will fly to shivers, should any poisonous liquid be poured into it; together with sundry medicines, the receipts of which have been as heir looms in my master's house. For it, is well known to your Majesty, that from the great Cosmo, down to the present day, there is no family in Europe so wise in distillations, and rich in the possession of potent poisons; and wondrous antidotes, such as would enable you to save life, even if the Aqua Tophana had been in the draught."

"Hech! Sirs," said the King, moving uneasily in his chair. "It gars ane grew to hear o' sic' deevilries. And what is the reason of this *insana inimicitia*, as I might ca' it,—this

perpetual spite towards me upon the part of the Vatican?"

"Can you ask, Sire? The natural wish of the Catholic Hierarchy, to have a Catholic King upon the throne."

"Weel, weel, that's no to wonder at. But if ye chance to foregather wi' the Paap, for nae doubt ye are a Roman, ye may just tell him in his lug, that I dinna think his a bad creed ava; and if he wad just let folk be, he and I wad 'gree weel eneugh. Ye may add, that I hae nae prejudices o' ony sort; and that's the doom's truth. For o' my four dominies, ane was a Calvinist, ane a Lutheran, and the ither twa—the Abbots of Dryburgh and Cambuskenneth, Catholics. Sae, ye see, I'm half a Roman mysel'. And ye may say, forbye, that if I daured speak my mind, I wad rather hae in the poopit o' the Chapel Royal, the warst Mess-John that ever stood in shoe-leather, than ane o' thae Bulls o' Bashan in Geneva bands, wha keep rowting and excommunicating, and misca'ing kings, and comparing them wi' Ahabs and Hamans, and Jeroboams, in a mainner

that's just awfu'. But I hae got the ring," continued James, as he passed his new gift on his finger, "and sae there is nae chance o' my being pushioned the day, and as to the ither matters, they can be discussed at a mair convanient season. Sae we may as weel hae a crack about something pleasant. That gowd chain o' yours—"

"The one that I exhibited in the Hall?"

"Just that. It'll be in the coffer, and ye'll hae got it about ye. Let's see it again."

The Italian, in obedience to the expressed wish, took from beneath his cloak, the casket containing his jewellery, and produced to the King's eyes, the chain which had formerly charmed him.

Once more, James eagerly seized it, weighed it in his hand, examined minutely its workmanship, passed it over his neck, and tied it round his hat; with that passion for display which so often unites slatterns and finery.

"Its just grand," muttered he to himself. "I tell ye again," he exclaimed, addressing his companion, "I maun hae that chain."

"Impossible, Sire. The jewels are but lent by a Venetian goldsmith to my master, and I was entrusted with them merely to give support to my assumed character. To part with them is beyond my power."

"Hout! Ye are no bound to act wi' Kings, as wi' common men. What value div ye put on't?"

"I heard it estimated at two hundred ducats!"

"Some eight hundred merks. Come now," said James, producing from a side pocket, the money which he had received from Bowes, and which, like a child in possession of its first half-penny, he was wretched till he got spent. "There's three hundred and twenty in the bag, and I will gi'e ye my note o' hand for the remainder."

"Impossible."

"But I'll pay ye to a day, man. *In verbo principis*, to a day."

"I doubt not your Majesty's accuracy, but the dull-souled trader to whom the jewellery belongs, would not accept it."

"And I'll gi'e ye collateral security," said the King, whose childish passion for the new toy, seemed but to increase with the difficulties

thrown in his way. "I'll gi'e ye, I say, collateral security. I ha'e got a bond here, for six hundred and eighty merks. Nane o' your doubtfu' obligations! It's frae the English Ambassador. Thae Southerners, hae the *nummos in arcâ*, man. Ye'll find a' the gowd o' Ophir in their pouch."

The eyes of the Envoy sparkled for a moment, but his features once more assumed their ordinary calm expression, and in a cold, measured tone, he said;

"It is my duty, as it is my wish to please your Majesty. May I see the document you speak of?" And taking the paper from the eager hands of the King, he proceeded to peruse it.

"A bond," continued he, at length, "for six hundred and eighty merks, in consideration of your Majesty's assuring to him your right to dispose in marriage, of a certain damsel, called Mary Ker?"

"Just that—ane of the Queen's maidens."

"I doubt if I could take it."

"What hinders ye?"

"Its payment might be disputed. Your Majesty might die. This Sir Robert Bowes

might die. It is not worth more at the most, than fifty ducats."

"Weel! Weel! Weel! Tak' it at fifty," said the King. "Sae for that, and the money in the bag, ye'll gi'e us the chain."

"Impossible. I pray you, Sire, to remark, that its least value, is two hundred ducats, and there are still seventy remaining unaccounted for."

"I had forgotten. I hae twenty angels in my pouch. There's forty ducats mair."

"Still thirty remaining due."

"But ye'll gie me credit for them ony gait?"

"Impossible. I am already incurring no small risk, in gratifying your Majesty, even on those terms I mention."

"And me without anither bawbee!" said James, plaintively, and scratching his head as if he hoped to force from its interior, some project for relieving his difficulties. Apparently, the operation was successful, for a sudden smile broke over his features, and, he exclaimed in a joyous tone, "I ha'e ye now man—I ha'e ye now. It wad be just a blessing to the hail kintra-side, if a chield like yoursel' wi' siccan a

power o' siller in his pouch, were to settle in't. So ye'll be taking a house, and needing plenishing for't, and thae awmries," continued he, pointing to some magnificent cabinets that decorated the side walls, "wad just suit ye. I'll sell them cheap."

"No, no, Sire," said the Envoy, laughing. "I travel on horseback, and to a way-farer like myself, such goods might be inconvenient."

The King flung himself back in his chair, with the glance and gesture of desperation.

"Div ye ken what ye're doing, man," said he, as soon as he was able to articulate, and in a tone of uncontrollable irritation. "Are ye considerin' o' the responsibility that ye're taking on yersel'? I'll complain o' ye to your Prince. I'll hae ye made accountable to the Three Estates of the realm. For suld I gang demented, as I am like to do if ye wunna let me ha'e that chain, ye will be held *unico consensu*, to be the *causa malorum*—the very spring, fountain, and source, of the ruin of this kingdom, in the skaith done to me its head."

"Well, well," said the Envoy, with a relenting

smile. "I am anxious to oblige your Majesty, although in doing so, I go beyond my powers. You have sold the Wardship and marriage of this Mary Ker, to Sir Robert Bowes."

"Just that."

"It gives him the power of marrying her himself, or marrying her to any one he may designate. Now, what your Majesty shall do, is this. You shall sell me the Wardship and marriage, with the same ample powers, and I will excuse you the thirty ducats."

"But what's the gude o' that, if Sir Robert has the prior contract?"

"I may persuade him to resign it."

"I'll believe that, when I ha'e seen ye persuade a rotten out frae atween the teeth o' a Sky-terrier."

"But supposing the English Ambassador were inclined to resign his rights, would you have any objection to the plan I spoke of?"

"Me objections! Fient an objection ha'e I. Sae lang as I get the chain, I care na' if the lassie be buckled to the Deil, or Wat Balcanquhal."

"Then your Majesty is willing to sell me the Wardship and marriage with the further clause, that if Sir Robert Bowes resigns his claim, I stand in his shoes, and my right is good against all the world."

"'Against all deadly,' as the phrase is. I'll gi'e ye my personal warrandice on't."

"Be it so then, and with your Majesty's permission, I will now draw up the bond."

With the words, the Italian drew his chair to the table, and with a hand that was evidently accustomed to such matters, prepared the contract. When finished, he read it carefully over, as if to guard against the possibility of error. But the document appeared satisfactory, and he presented it to the King.

James perused it with an eager eye.

"My certie, lad," said he, "ane might suppose that ye had been cleckit in the Court of Session. I doubt if ane o' my ain Clerks to the Signet could hae done the job mair featly. And now for the Jacobus Rex," and with a sprawling hand, he attached his own signature.

"There's your paper," continued he, "sae gie us the chain, lad. Gie us the chain."

"As soon, Sire, as I have received the three hundred and twenty merks, the angels, and the bond of the English Ambassador."

James pushed towards him the document in question, and the two bags containing the money, with an air of the most perfect indifference. At the same moment, he clutched the chain, twisted it round his hat, and placing the beaver on his head, strutted about the room, as proud of his finery as a peacock of its plumage, now removing the ornamented bonnet from his brow, to gaze enraptured at his new acquisition, and now planting himself before a Venetian mirror, as if he sought in its dimmed and dirty surface, to gain a more distinct idea of his outline.

"I'm ridiculous braw," said he to himself. "I wuss that that cankered auld carle, Davie Moyse were here to see us. I suld like to ken what he would say now. Nae mair reflections on my want o' attention to dress, I'se warrant.

And here," continued he, as a rap was heard at the door. "I doubt na he comes."

His Majesty was wrong. The person who, on permission being given, entered the room, was Bernard Lindsay, the Gentleman Usher to the Queen, and he, in a low tone, intimated to the Signor Octavio that his Mistress wished to see him before he left the palace.

"The Queen?" said James, whose ear had caught the words. "I wonder what she'll say to my chain. She will be just mad that she did na get it hersel'. So come your ways, Sir Italian, and I'll gang wi' ye."

The arrangement did not seem satisfactory to the Gentleman Usher, for in an embarrassed tone, he intimated that her Majesty wished to see the Venetian alone.

"Like eneugh," replied his Master, in a tone of affected dignity, "but if ye had studied the Scripturs, Bernard, wi' the acumen of ane wha shall be nameless, ye might have learned that husband and wife are ae flesh, and so my being bye will no signify. *Andiamo dunque, Signor*

Ottavio. I daur to say, our Royal Consort will be for asking ye some questions anent that pictur' o' yours ; and I am as keen to learn about it as hersel'. For it's no' an ilka-day thing that mak's Queens faint, and turns topsy-turvy the Court of the wisest King in Christendom."

And seizing the Italian by the arm, and preceded by the apparently little satisfied domestic, James made his way to the private apartment of Anne of Denmark.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PORTRAIT.

It was midnight, and Anne of Denmark was alone. The traces of recent suffering were still visible, but the natural energy of her character had enabled her to struggle successfully with the sorrow which had for the moment overcome her, and she had once more resumed her usual manner and expression. At intervals, however, there was a slight twitch about the corners of her mouth, as if memory were lulled, not dead; and from time to time, her eyes turned towards the door, with a glance half of eagerness and half of terror, as if the appearance of her expected visitor was a matter alike of hope and fear.

At length was heard the long expected subdued tap upon the portal, and the Usher entered followed by James and the Italian.

The King was in high spirits.

His presence did not appear to produce the same feelings of ecstatic happiness upon his Consort, for her eyebrows lowered, and she looked at her unfortunate domestic with a glance which had, for the moment, almost the fierceness of a tigress. The look and its meaning seemed to be thoroughly understood, for it was replied to on the part of Bernard Lindsay, by a deprecating look, and a slight shrug of the shoulders, as if to assure his mistress that he had nothing to do with the appearance of the unwelcome visitor. The keen eye of the Italian lost nothing of the by-play. By James, it was unremarked, and in his usual boisterous manner, he exclaimed:

"Weel, my Leddy wife, here we are. I doubt na but ye're deeing to ken a' about the pictur'. So am I, and there is naething like killing twa birds with ae stane. Sae I'm come to hear the story."

"Your Majesty is in error. Nor do I well know to what you allude. There is probably no story to tell, and if there were, I have no wish to listen to it. I am subject to spasms. I have lately suffered severely from them, and I have sent for the jeweller, but to congratulate him on his escape from the hands of those barbarous subjects of yours. I trust, Sir," said she, turning for the first time towards the Italian, "that they have done you no injury."

"Neither in person or purse," said the King, hastening to anticipate his companion. "I'll tak my davy o' that. As to the former, there he stands, forenent ye, as sound as an egg. And as to the latter, if ye had lookit at my bonnet, ye might hae seen that his jewellery had fa'en into safe hands. Weel, what div ye think o' it? What div ye think o' me?"

"Think!" said the Queen, in a contemptuous tone. "Can there be two opinions on the subject? The chain is beautiful, and looks admirably on the person of one so celebrated for the taste and magnificence of his dress, as your Majesty. But may I ask how you became

possessed of it? For if I understood the Signor aright, it was not for sale."

"Madam," said the Italian, "I yielded to his Majesty, upon strong entreaty."

"Faith, mair than entreaty, for I doubt but I micht have begged it till my knees were bare, and to nae end. Sae I bade him a price for't; and what div ye think I gied? The English Ambassador's bond, and a' the ready money I gat frae him."

"Your Majesty," said the Signor Octavio, "forgets an important part of the bargain."

"Faith, that's true. I sald him besides, the wardship and marriage of that lassie, Mary Ker."

"And how dare you, Sir," said the Queen, "dispose of the hand of one of my maidens, without my consent. Nay, more, how could you sell that which was not yours to give. It has already been disposed of to Sir Robert Bowes."

"Nay, Madam," said the Italian, "I must in this exculpate his Majesty. It was done at

my express solicitation, and I am confident you will approve of it."

"Never."

"But Sir Robert Bowes—"

"Is my friend—and I will not see his rights invaded."

"And yet," said the Italian with a smile. "I would fain have entered the lists against him."

"You, Sir! and pray who are you? Sir Robert is an Ambassador—the representative of a high and mighty Prince, and you—"

"Why that's it," broke in the King. "That's just it. Simple as he stands there, that chield is a—"

"A pedlar, your Majesty," hurriedly interrupted the Italian; looking at James with a meaning glance, "your Majesty was going to say a pedlar."

"A pedlar! Ou ay, just a pedlar," stammered forth the discomfited monarch. "Gude guide us,' muttered he to himself, as he shambled aside. "That was near setting the lum in a low."

"And how," said the Queen once more in a

haughty tone; addressing the Italian, "do you dare to put yourself on the same footing with a wealthy noble. The Knight of Streatlam possesses wide lands, and rich Lordships, and you—"

"Nothing, Madam, but a portrait."

Once more Anne of Denmark's face became deadly pale. In the excitement of the moment, the picture had been forgotten, but the mention of it brought back all her former terrors.

Not such were the feelings of the King. He too had lost sight of the subject, but the allusion to it awoke in full force his natural curiosity.

"Hech sirs, that's true. Let's see the pictur, man. For I doubt na ye hae got it about ye."

"With your Majesty's permission, I am at present addressing the Queen. She has not yet done me the honour to inform me if she will sanction my addresses to Mistress Mary Ker."

"Never, Sir. My word has passed to the English Ambassador, and I will keep it."

The Signor Octavio bowed profoundly, and

with the air of a man, who understood too well his position to dispute for a moment her commands. He then turned to the King.

"Sire," said he, with his usual quiet smile; "you did me the honour to express curiosity with regard to the portrait. I have the happiness of offering it to the view of your Majesty."

With the words, he drew as before, a small leather case from the breast of his doublet, opened it, and placed in the King's hands the miniature, whose first appearance was attended with such extraordinary results.

It was an exquisite work of art, painted in enamel, and represented a young man of about three-and-twenty. The forehead bright with intelligence, the slender nostril, the chiselled mouth, the long fair hair clustered in ringlets on temples and neck—all were in the highest style of classic beauty; while the bonnet of blue velvet, with its band of diamonds; the satin doublet, the gold chain round the neck, the diamond hilted rapier—in their turn bore testimony, that rank and wealth had not been wanting to eke out the gifts of nature.

In the lower part of the frame, and beneath the oval, were imprinted in gilt letters.

S. B. &
Sposi.

Upon the edge, moreover, of the morocco leather case, in which the miniature was set, were two hinges, that had, apparently, connected it with a counterpart; as if the picture in question formed only a part of the original.

The King contemplated it eagerly.

The Queen became once more pale as death.

"Weel," said James after a while, "the lad is certainly no ill-faured. He has no, to be sure, that dignity of appearance that only belangs to a King, and his mouth's ower sma'. Yet tak the hail tott o' him, he's no that ill. But what div ye judge is the meaning of thae letters below—'S. B. &.'"

"I form merely a guess, Sire; for how could it be expected that I could know that which has puzzled your Majesty; but it appears to me, that these are the initials of the young man's name."

"And then the hinges?"

"They were to attach the frame to the other half."

"A blank, nae doubt?"

"No, Sire, it contained another picture, such as this—that of a lady."

"Sae, sae! that explains the '&.' It connects the twa."

"You are right, Sire," and he looked with a glance of intelligence at the Queen, as he added, "They *were* connected."

"And this word *Sposi* below, what's the meaning o' that?"

"On the other picture, Sire, if I recollect right was the word *Promessi*."

"*Sposi Promessi*, why that's the Italian, man, for betrothed. I'm jealousin' that the young folk were lovers."

"It is possible, Sire, that you are right. What says your Majesty?" said he, turning to the Queen. "Do you think they were lovers?"

"Yes, yes," said Anne, in a faint tone, scarce conscious of what she uttered, "no doubt lovers."

"And whar," said James, "is the other pictur?"

"It is lost, Sire."

"Lost!" said Anne, as her eyes brightened, and her cheek flushed, "lost did ye say?" and she turned eagerly to the Signor Octavio.

"Madam," said the Italian, as he met her enquiring look, "I was inaccurate in my language, I ought to have said, mislaid."

"And you could find it again?"

"If I were compelled, Madam, to devote my time to looking for it, I think it is probable," said he, in a tone full of meaning, "that it might be recovered."

"I trust sae man," broke in the King eagerly, "for I'm fond o' works o' art."

"And I doubt not, that this would interest your Majesty. For beautiful as is the miniature in your hand, the other was still more exquisite."

"And that ither had, nae doubt, its initials, as weel as this ane?"

"It had."

"And what were they?"

The question seemed to rouse Anne from her

trance, for she raised herself hurriedly in her chair, and exclaimed in an agitated tone.

"Why trouble you the Signor with idle questions? His memory may be good, but he cannot remember every thing, or recollect the initials of persons in whom he took no interest. A stranger in the country, he came hither—"

"But to ask, Madam," said Baldi, bowing profoundly, "to ask the assent of your Majesty to the purchase of the Wardship of Mistress Mary Ker."

The Queen clasped her hands, as if in despair, and once more sank back in her seat.

The unconcealed agitation evidently had its effect upon the feelings of the Italian, and it was with something of kindness in his tone, that he addressed her.

"Madam," said he, "you are right. I am a man immersed in my own affairs. I came here but with one object, and if I obtain that, I have no time to think about other people's matters, or to remember names that concern me not. At the present moment, my hopes, my wishes, every

feeling of my heart is concentrated in the success of my petition to your Majesty—the approval of my marriage with your handmaiden."

The Queen understood him, for she once more wrung her hands, and exclaimed in a faint tone. "It is impossible."

"Madam, nothing is impossible."

"But I have given pledges."

"When the will assents, pledges may be broken."

"Something more may be needed than the will. There may be danger in the breaking of them."

"Madam, life is but a choice of dangers, and that which is avoided, may be less than that which is braved."

The words appeared to impress Anne of Denmark, for she communed with herself for a minute, as if weighing the risks.

"No, no," said she, at length, "I cannot —I dare not. Things must remain as they are."

There was an expression of dissatisfaction in

the face of the Italian, and he stood for a moment silent, and motionless, as if uncertain what to say or do. At length, with a sigh, as if he were pursuing some line of action against his will, he turned to the King, whose puzzled eyes had wandered from one companion to another, as if unable to comprehend a word of the conference that was passing before him.

"Sire," said the Signor Octavio, "I am unfortunately unable to gratify your Majesty's curiosity, and the initials of the lady have for the moment escaped me. But I have before me her lineaments as distinctly as if she had been seated in that chair."

"What chair, man? The Queen's?"

"Precisely."

"Then ye maun needs be able to gie us an accurate description."

"I shall endeavour to distinguish myself by my correctness. The forehead of the young lady was lofty, the nose aquiline, the mouth fine, the hair auburn, the eyes dark-brown, the figure tall, the movement stately, the bearing regal."

"Why, man, the description wad answer our ain wife."

"Well, now, that is extraordinary. It never occurred to me. But since your Majesty's superior discernment has discovered it, I confess that the resemblance between her Majesty, and the lady of the portrait appears to me, at this moment, positively wonderful."

"Like's an ill mark," said the King. "But Gude guide us!" continued he in a tone of alarm, "what's the maitter with our consort?" for Anne had suddenly sunk back in her chair; and the attitude, and the deadly paleness of her face, seemed to intimate that her senses were leaving her. But even at a moment of such internal torture, her courage, like that of a martyr at the stake, supported her, and she muttered in a low tone.

"It is nothing, Sire. Nothing but a spasm. In a few minutes I shall be well."

"I can mak naething o't," said James to himself. "It is utterly unintelligible."

All at once, as if some irritating thought

had crossed his mind, he turned, and almost fiercely, upon the Italian.

"And whar, Sirrah," said he, "gat ye thae picturs?"

The Signor Octavio did not lose his self-possession, for he instantly replied:

"Of that, Sire, I shall be happy to inform you; that is to say, if I have the permission of her Majesty, for the story is a long one. Have I, Madam," continued he, turning to his agitated companion, "have I your consent?"

"Yes, yes, tell him all—all." And as if exhausted by the effort, she once more sank back in the chair.

"I thank you, Madam," was the answer, uttered in the same even tone as before, "and now to my story.

"It is, methinks, about nine years ago. I had incurred the displeasure of my Sovereigns, and to escape danger, fled an exile to a foreign land. It chanced, however, that their anger was great, and I was warned by a friend, that my retreat was suspected, and their emissaries on my track. In consequence, for greater safety, I left the

city which had been my refuge, and sought the open country. For three hours I wandered on, till I found myself in a domain almost regal in extent. By the side of a lake—like that beneath your windows—rose a stately palace, rich in carved stone work, and the number of its minaret capped towers. At some little distance, and in the neighbourhood of the water, was a large summer-house. It seemed deserted. The door had fallen from its hinges, and a large portion of its interior was piled with billets for firewood. Behind them I found a recess, and in this I took shelter."

"If ye're cauldrife, it was na muckle o' a bield."

"The summer, Sire, was waning into autumn, and the weather was still warm, so that I suffered little from any inclemency of temperature. At peep of dawn I stole forth to purchase food from the neighbouring cottages, and then returned to my hiding place. Yet early as the hour was at which I went abroad, there were others on foot, as well as myself. More than once had I remarked a

young man and maiden together in the more secluded portions of the forest. Fearful for my own safety, I enquired their names, and learned that they were the daughter of the great noble, I might almost say prince, in whose domains I had taken refuge, and a young man, her inferior in degree, but her lover."

"The lad and lass in the picturs?"

"Exactly. Nothing escapes the observation of your Majesty. But to resume. One evening, it was about nightfall, as I was as usual concealed in the recess behind the firewood, I suddenly heard footsteps. As visitors I had none, I doubted not that my bloodhounds had got upon the scent, and I laid my hand upon my sword, with the intention of selling life as dearly as possible, when, suddenly, the young man entered.

"He had been seekin' for ye."

"No, Sire, I was not in question. His manner was agitated, for he kept pacing backwards and forwards in the little chamber, stopping every now and then to listen, as if he expected to be joined by some one at the ren-

dez-vous. He was not disappointed. In a few minutes, I heard the quick, light step of female feet, and in another minute, a young girl rushed into the apartment. Despair was in her face—for through the openings in the pile of timber, I could see every thing that passed—and the sight of her lover, seemed to agitate rather than relieve her, for as soon as she became conscious of his presence, she gave a slight scream, and flinging her arms about his neck, fainted.

"Weel," said James, in a tone of intense contempt. "It is extraordinar' what fules some folk mak o' themsels, and a' about love, and sic like nonsense."

The Italian made no observation upon the royal remark, and continued.

"It is all over," said she, as soon as she was able to articulate. "My fate is sealed. My cruel parents have decided upon marrying me to another—a man I have never seen—a man whom I detest—I loathe. What is worse, they already suspect you as the cause of my disgust, and if their suspicions be confirmed, your life will pay the penalty. But, fortunately, I have

been able to carry off the miniatures, and the attestation of our union, in the presence of my nurse and her husband,' and she produced a miniature case and a written paper. Scarcely were the words uttered, when voices were heard in the forest. 'They are searching for you,' said she. 'So fly—for heaven's sake fly,' but ere he could obey her wishes, she sprang towards him, and tore from his grasp the portraits, and the written document, of which he had possessed himself. 'No, no, not these,' she exclaimed hastily. 'If you were stopped, and they were found on you, it would be death.' There was a hurried kiss, and he was gone. With trembling fingers, the girl concealed the miniature case, and the paper in a cleft among the billets, and then, as if she had thought it more prudent not to wait the approach of her pursuers, went forth to meet them. In a few minutes, the sound of her steps died away, and I was once more alone. When all was silent, I stole from my covert, and possessed myself of the precious deposits, with the intention of restoring them to their

rightful owners, but the necessity of looking after my own safety prevented me."

"And you have them still?"

"I have one of the portraits," replied the Italian, "and I dare to say," added he, with a significant smile, "I could still recover the other."

"And the paper?"

"It is the evidence of a private marriage, Sire; and if produced now, for the lady married afterwards the great Prince selected by her parents, would leave her without a claim to husband, or to children."

There was a pause for a minute. James said nothing; and over the Queen's expressive brow changing resolves passed rapidly. The Italian alone remained self-possessed, and his chiselled and marble-like features, wore their usual cold, calm smile.

Anne of Denmark, was the first to break the silence.

"And what," said she in a low faint voice, "has this unfortunate lady done, that you should seek to injure her?"

"You err, Madam. I have no such wish."

"And yet you expose her to infinite peril, by the pertinacity of your solicitations."

"Madam," said he, looking long and steadfastly at the Queen, "you must forget," and he added after a while, "yourself. Pertinacity of my solicitations, said you! It was but yesterday morning, I was remarking to myself, that from that day we had never met."

The Queen understood the warning, for she hurriedly exclaimed: "True, true, true. I was speaking but folly. How could I be so silly? And you have no ill-will," resumed she, "to this lady?"

"None, Madam. I repeat none, whatever; but I have a great object at stake, and I expect, that if I keep her secret, she will assist me in obtaining it."

"Well," said she, with emphasis. If *I* were in her place, I would not hesitate—"

"To sacrifice every thing, Madam, to save honour."

"Yes:—everything to save honour."

The Italian bent his keen eye on her.

"Do I understand you aright," said he.

"Perfectly."

The Signor Octavio seemed relieved, for it was with a gay air that he turned to James, whose puzz'ed countenance, shewed that he had been in vain endeavouring to extract an idea from the language of his companions.

"It is a strange story, your Majesty," said he, addressing the King.

"Vara," was the reply. "And sae the lassie was married to twa men at the same time."

"Beyond a question."

"And did the second husband never guess onything o' this?"

"Not a syllable."

"Hech, Sirs! he maun hae been a sumph."

"A what, Sire?"

"A gowk—a gomeril—an idiot."

"On the contrary, Sire, he was considered a Solomon."

"Why, that's what they ca' me!"

"Ah! Sire," said the Italian, with a profound bow, "no one who has had the felicity of being admitted to the presence of your Majesty, can have any doubts as to your claim

to the title. But I must beg, Sire, your permission to withdraw; and yet ere I go, I would fain terminate, happily, the negotiation which I so auspiciously commenced. You have given me the wardship of Mistress Mary Ker. I now beg your intercession with her Majesty. This, Sire," said he, "would make your chain perfect, and this shall be your's, if you win for me the Queen's assent to the warrant."

As he spoke, he drew from the interior of his cloak the jewel case, and selecting from it a clasp, set with diamonds, placed it in the King's hands.

"What!" said James, as his eyes sparkled with pleasure. "Gie me that, did ye say. Faith I'll hae a try for't. Come, come, my dawtie," said he, addressing the Queen, in tones intended to be persuasive. "He's no a bad young man this, and ye maun just pleasure me, and gie your consent to the marriage."

"Be it so," said the Queen, with well affected regret. "I had decided otherwise, but if it make you happy, my wishes shall be subject to yours. So, Sir Italian," continued

she, with a smile. "Let us see this warrant of yours, that I may attach my signature to it."

The Signor Octavio respectfully presented it, and the "Anna R." was soon added to the document.

"There," said she, "is what you prayed for. Nay, I will not be friends by halves. You may kiss my hand."

The Envoy of the Grand Duke sank upon his knee, and the fair fingers as he raised them to his lips, pressed his own in token of amity. The pressure was cordially returned, and the Signor Octavio once more assuming his upright attitude, prepared to depart.

"Madam," said he, as he took leave. "I thank you, and I hope to prove my gratitude. To you, Sire, how can I sufficiently speak my thanks for your aid?"

"Hout," said the King, "it's no worth speaking about. And I hae nae time to think o't. I was pondering on what you hae been telling us. That story of yours, is as hard to read as the Eleusinian mysteries. It's ayont

even me. Naething but the Sphynx, or the Oracle of Delphi could solve its enigmas."

"Your Majesty is ever felicitous in your allusions, but never more so than now; for it is precisely a matter on which the Oracle you speak of, has already pronounced."

"Ye're daffin'.

"I was never, Sire, more serious. In ancient times, such are the words of a Wise Man of the East, there was a King of Babylon."

"Was't Nebuchadnezzar?"

"No, Sire."

"Wha was't then? Div ye no mind how they ca'ed him?"

"His name, Sire, has unfortunately escaped my memory, but the fact is unquestionable. There was then, I repeat, a King of Babylon. A princess of his house ran away with a young Court noble, and her Royal Sire, puzzled by an event at once so unprecedented and extraordinary, sent to the Holy Shrine to inquire its cause."

"And what said the Priestess?"

"Strong in her inspiration, and her womanhood, she answered thus:—

"'WHEN KINGS DON'T MARRY THEIR DAUGHTERS, THE DAUGHTERS MARRY THEMSELVES.'"

And bowing profoundly, the Italian left the Royal pair to apply, as they might, the wisdom of the past, and quitted the apartment. He descended the stair-case. Instead, however, of turning to the left towards the great door, which led into the court-yard, he looked eagerly round him. A tall muffled figure was lounging in a dark corner of the hall. It had evidently awaited his appearance, for it beckoned to him to approach. The Signor Octavio instantly complied with the signal, and following his mysterious guide, was soon lost to view in the ill-lighted corridors of the Palace.

CHAPTER XIII.

REACTION.

Late as it was when the Signor Octavio quitted the Queen's chamber, there were other denizens of the palace, who, like him and his distinguished hosts, were still waking. They were Lady Beatrice Ruthven and Mistress Ker—the fair cause of all the turmoil, which, for the last four hours, had shaken so rudely the conventional proprieties of the royal residence.

We left Mary in the garden. Overwhelmed by her feelings and the perseverance of her detested lover—by the anguish arising from her new-born doubts of the Queen's affection,

and, most of all, by the mortification, which her pride had received when the Lord Warden had been summoned to her rescue, she had remained for some time insensible in the pavilion: and it was only the long-continued assiduities of the sister of Lord Gowrie, that restored her to consciousness. The friendly labour, however, had, at length, been successful, and by the aid of the same affectionate solicitude, she had been once more conducted to her chamber. But the shock had been too violent to allow its effects to pass readily away, and she now lay sunk amid the cushions of a large arm-chair—for with the petulance of sickness, she had refused going to bed—the dulled eye and blanched cheek giving ample evidence of the intensity of the inward struggle.

By her side was Lady Beatrice. She had hastened back to her friend's apartment, as soon as she had been relieved of her duties of attendance on her Mistress, and she now sat by the ailing girl, turning at

intervals to glance at her charge, and ever and anon fixing her gaze upon vacancy, and abandoning herself to her own meditations.

A slight movement attracted her attention. Mary had stirred uneasily in her chair.

"Are you in pain, love," said the kindly nurse, as she once more carefully arranged the cloak upon the shoulders of the invalid, "do you suffer much?"

"Not in pain, Beatrice," was the scarcely audible reply, "but if suffering be a thing of mind and not of limb, Heaven knows it is severe enough."

"But your hands are cool, love," said Beatrice, as she touched the girl's fingers, "you are calm. Thank Heaven! the mind, at least, is spared. God help me! I had feared, that reason might have been shaken in its seat. No, no! you will soon be well, and we shall once more be happy."

The word was repeated, as if in echo—so faint was the tone in which it was uttered, but it was eloquent with memories.

"Yes! happy. Why should you not be so? Why should you doubt it?"

"Why, rather should I believe in its possibility? That fearful man!" And Mary covered her eyes with her hands, as if to shut out some loathsome figure from before them.

"I understand, love:—but you are not yet his wife."

"True. But the days of my freedom are numbered."

"Yet some lucky chance may even now intervene.

"Beatrice," said Mary, with a faint smile, as she turned and laid her hand kindly on that of her friend, "you would have me hope against hope, and yet to what chance can I look? Did you not tell me," and the colour for a moment, once more flushed her pale cheek, "did you not tell me that you had seen the young Baron of Barnbougle."

"Frank Mowbray?"

"He brought you a message, did he not, from the Lord Warden?"

"Alas! but too true. Sir Robert would not meet him."

"It was an aid that I asked not, and wished not; but you would have it so, and yet that, too, has failed."

Beatrice made no answer.

Once more her eyes fixed themselves on vacancy, and she relapsed into her musings. They seemed little satisfactory, however, for from time to time, a scarcely perceptible movement of the head intimated that some new device of her active imagination, had sprung into existence, only to be discarded as unequal to the emergency.

"Ah! Mary," said she, at length, "why did you refuse the Lord Warden?"

The cheek of the invalid flushed, and the eyelids trembled, but there was no reply.

"You do not answer me, my darling," "could you not have loved him?"

"I thought so, then."

"Then!" repeated Lady Beatrice, with emphasis, "merciful God! is there to be fresh misery for us? Have you changed your opinion? Do you not think so now?"

Mary's lips compressed themselves, as if she would have made an effort to exhibit firmness, but nature was too strong to be resisted, and throwing her arms round Lady Beatrice's neck, she burst into tears.

The gentle nurse did her best to proffer consolation, but still, the pearly drops fell fast, and the only reply to the anxious questionings, was an occasional convulsive pressure, as if the sufferer had feared to lose the support of her friend, and wished to satisfy herself of her presence. Gradually, however, Mary became calmer, but the fair forehead still nestled itself on Beatrice's shoulder, and the fair arms still twined themselves round her neck.

The daughter of Lord Gowrie understood the movement.

"Do not agitate yourself, love," said she, "I ask nothing—I wish to know nothing."

Mary seemed to appreciate the delicacy of her companion, and for some moments there was silence. Insensibly the colour crimsoned the cheek and neck of the invalid. As before the arms tightened in their grasp, and a low faint voice whispered, "Ah! Beatrice, what must you think of me?"

"Think of you, Mary," said her companion, returning the pressure, "are you not the sister of my affections;—the being upon earth I most love and cling to?"

"And you are not laughing at me, you are not mocking me?"

"Mock you? Why?"

"About what you said just now."

"About your feelings towards a certain person having changed?"

Once more the crimson flush mounted to cheek and brow—once more the arms tightened in their pressure, and the same small voice whispered in her ear, "yes."

Lady Beatrice looked troubled; as if the confession, though scarce unexpected, was little

welcome. She spoke at length, but with something of embarrassment.

"And what, child, has occasioned a revulsion of sentiment so extraordinary? Nay, sit up. Why should you blush, love, to speak it in a sister's ear."

Mary resumed her place upon the couch. Her eye stole a glance at her companion, as if to assure herself of her sympathy. Apparently it had restored her courage, and in a firmer tone than before, she said,

"Would he not have risked life for me?"

"But you forget, love," said Beatrice, with a smile, "that he said it was for my sake, that he undertook the jeopardy."

"But yet——"

"But yet, Mistress Ker imagined, that had there not been some little spark of affection for herself, he would not have faced the danger so readily."

Mary blushed.

"God help me, girl!" resumed her friend, "it's a tangled yarn. You would, and you

would not. How much misery might it have saved us, had you felt at Newark as you feel now."

Again there was silence for some minutes.

"And you think," said Mary, at length, as if to fortify herself against a doubt that began to affect her painfully, "you think he still cares for me?"

"I doubt it not."

"And you think—" and the fair speaker again paused, as if she once more found difficulty in expressing herself.

"That he will still assert his right to your hand. Is it not so?"

The fair head beside her, nodded a slight assent.

"He may have the wish, love, but to be frank with you, I scarce see how he has the power. Sir Robert Bowes has purchased your marriage of the King, and I can devise no means by which the bond may be withdrawn from his grasp."

"Yet it was the Queen's consent, and not the King's, that made it dangerous."

"No doubt, but that consent has been given also."

"Yes, but you may recollect, as I learned from her own lips, that it was wrung from her only by Bowes' possessing the knowledge of some dreadful secret."

"True, love, the cause is mysterious enough, but the result is not the less certain."

"And yet—"

"Yet what?"

"That fearful man's power might be neutralized by one, even greater than his own."

"Possibly, if such an influence existed. But how could you hope for the Queen's being the slave of another, and still more dreaded task-master."

"It was yourself suggested the thought. Did you not speak of the Italian. Did you not say he had been accused of magic?"

"Ha! You are right, girl. Be it magic or not, he evidently wields a spell over Anne

of Denmark, even more potent than that of the Ambassador of England."

"And could he not be brought to exercise it in our favour? Oh, Beatrice! dear Beatrice! think for me—act for me—find some means by which I may see this man, and on my bended knees will I beg of him to aid me."

"Aid you, love," said her companion, with a smile, "to escape the addresses of Sir Robert Bowes—"

"Yes—yes."

"But you have interrupted me. I have not yet finished my sentence—and help you to the arms of the Lord Warden?"

The young girl turned away her head, as if to conceal her face from the mocking glance of her friend.

"Well, well," said Lady Beatrice, laughing; "that double petition is no bad idea, and I will bethink me of some means of making it. But it would save labour, were this Signor Octavio really a sorcerer. He might read our thoughts,

and promise us protection. Ha!" said she, as she sprang to her feet with a slight scream. "What is that? Did you not mark that heavy blow upon the door?"

She hastened, as soon as her momentary terror permitted, to demand the business of the would-be intruder. But to her repeated interrogations there was no reply; at length, unable to resist any longer her curiosity, she laid her hand upon the lock; and, though with some hesitation, for it was an hour after midnight, withdrew the bolt, and looked forth.

In the little corridor from which the chamber entered, there was no living thing, but on its floor lay a letter. It was addressed to Mistress Mary Ker. Lady Beatrice hurriedly tore it open. It contained nothing, save a single slip of paper, but on that, traced in a large bold hand, was the word—HOPE.

CHAPTER XIV.

PRESENTIMENTS.

The night so teeming with incidents of importance to the inhabitants of the palace had passed. It was a new day, and early morning. The deer belled in the brake, the coot dived in the crystal waters of the Loch, the bright beams of an autumn sun gilded, with their radiance, the party coloured foliage of the forest, and all nature was joyous. Yet there was one spot in which its cheering voice seemed unheard, and unfelt, and that was the old Flemish house, the residence of the English Ambassador.

In the same chamber, in which we have already presented him to our readers, was Sir Robert Bowes.

The events of the preceding evening had excited to no common extent, his jealous temperament, and his curiosity. Bowes was a diplomatist, but he had received from nature many of those habits of thought, which less jaundiced spirits acquire only from the practice of their calling. By instinct, and by profession disposed to look deeply into the minds of others; he was subject to the error of most habitual analysers of men's actions—that of attributing them, on all occasions, to some secret and deep-laid plan; and thus, not unfrequently, of searching beneath the surface, for causes of conduct, the simple result of every day incidents and feelings.

It may be easily understood then, how deeply he was impressed by the scene which he had witnessed at the Palace; the more especially, as his natural disposition to suspect, had, for once, no insufficient grounds on which to base itself.

He had immediately recognized the Italian, as his fellow-traveller on the road, and though he had stood at a distance, and contemplated his proceedings with apparent indifference, he had not the less anxiously watched his every

look and movement. The production of the casket — the jewellery — the miniature — the fainting of the Queen—the seizure of the supposed sorcerer—his liberation by Buccleugh's Borderers—his interview with James, each had been noted in turn, and presented ample grounds for meditation, even in one less disposed than himself to speculate upon Court mysteries, and the doings of Court actors. After the retirement of James, however, and the continued illness of Anne of Denmark, as he could not allege any sufficient reason for lingering about the Palace, he resolved to return to his own quarters. To them, accordingly, he made his way, after giving the most stringent instructions to his *protégé* Fowler, to exert every nerve to acquire information, and communicate to him, on the following morning, any matters of importance that he might be able to gather. And now he awaited the arrival of his spy, in full dress, with beaver on head, and sword at side, as if ready for instantaneous action, if action should be necessary.

His patience, however, was doomed to be

sorely tried. Full two hours had elapsed since he first commenced pacing his chamber, and still his confidant came not. At length, the well known step was heard upon the stair, and Fowler entered.

"You are late, Tom," said the Ambassador with something like anger in his tone, "late—late! What in the name of all the Gods has detained you?"

"Your Excellency, instead of rating me, should commend me for my diligence. 'Tis but now I escaped from the King's chamber."

"And why not long ere this? It needs no brilliant imagination, to hood-wink that blind buzzard master of yours."

"True; but David Moyse, do what I might, would not quit the room. The old rascal is as keen-eyed as a hawk, and I fear that he already suspects that I am not over true servant to King Jamie, and I dared not risk it."

"Well, now that you are come, out with your budget. This pedlar—this jeweller—"

"Was rescued by Buccleugh's spearmen."

"Pshaw! I know that—what then?"

"He had an interview with the King."

"I know that too. What did he next?"

"Proceeded to the Queen's chamber."

"Ten thousand devils," said Bowes, stopping in his hurried walk; "you do not mean to allege that that foreign vagabond had an audience of Anne of Denmark?"

"I do."

"Impossible, she was dying — dead — too exhausted, at least, to see visitors."

"She saw, nevertheless, the Italian."

"And alone?"

"No, the King accompanied him."

"By my honour, the plot thickens. And what have you learned of the conference?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing!"

"Even so. Bernard Lindsay is like Moyse, somewhat jealous of me. I know not if he possess the secret, but if he did, he kept it well, for I could not gather a syllable."

The Ambassador seemed agitated. For some minutes he paced the room in silence. Suddenly, however, he stopped in front of his

confidant, and said abruptly—"What do you think of this, Tom?"

Fowler shook his head.

"And have you been able to gather what it was which caused the Queen's fainting?"

"Why, as all the world knows, a picture—"

"A picture of what?—what did it represent?"

"I saw it not myself, but from what I have gathered, it was a portrait."

"Of man or woman?"

"That I cannot tell."

"And I need scarce ask. It must have been a man. I never heard of one of the sex yet—beggar, wench, or princess, who would have been discomposed by the picture of any thing in petticoats, from a Venus to a Hecate. But the more I learn of this matter, Tom, the less I comprehend it; so I must try to collect my scattered thoughts. As for you, back to the palace. It would be a disgrace to an Ambassador *in presenti*, and possibly," continued he with a smile and a nod, "one *in futuro*, to be puzzled by an Italian pedlar."

Fowler retired, and Sir Robert was once more alone; and sinking into a chair, he abandoned himself to his meditations; moving uneasily at intervals, as if his reflections tended little to the elucidation of the mystery.

"I can make nothing of it," said he, at length. "That this fellow is something else than what he pretended to be, is evident enough. I left him in a thread-bare suit, on the back of a miserable pack-horse, speaking English as well as I do, and apparently as well acquainted as myself, with matters which men of his grade do not dream of. He hinted at Essex's arrest. Well! there was nothing mysterious in that. He might have heard the report. But from some words that dropped from him, he appeared to recognize me; and I should have said, but that the thing were impossible, that he guessed at the reason of my visit to Streatlam. And here I find him playing the Italian jeweller, with diamonds in his casket worth a king's ransom, and in a suit of black velvet that might have done for the Doge of Venice—nay, as if that were not good

fortune enough, favoured with audiences by James and by the Queen."

At that moment was heard the laughter of some of his retainers on the bench outside, and the word "Sorcerer" caught his ear.

"Ha!" said he. "My very knaves below there, are speaking of the fellow. They find no difficulty in reading the mystery. Magic—of course—magic has done all. But I have no faith in the Rosy Cross, or its disciples, and believe that men act on men only by human agency. And yet, how else to explain it. James has such a terror of plots and plotters, that weeks pass ere he can be persuaded to trust himself alone with a stranger, and nevertheless this fellow, this Italian, is admitted to an instant interview. And then, the Queen. She was fit for nothing but a sick bed, but she too insists upon seeing him—ay, even at midnight. Why his power is immense—inscrutable."

There was again a pause for awhile, as if he were once more employed in endeavouring to solve the enigma.

"It were useless to deny it," continued he,

"I frankly confess that the rascal puzzles me. Yet, after all, what matters it? The best philosophy is that which limits one's cares to one's self. Do with King and Queen what he will, he cannot affect me. I have but two objects—my marriage with Mary Ker, and my intrigue with Essex; and both are beyond his reach. For the first, I have the written authority of the King, and the documents which evidence the last, are in ashes at Streatlam. No," continued he, with a haughty smile, as he drew from a secret drawer, the Royal Warrant, "were he as very a magician as Cornelius Agrippa, he could not wave away with his wand, the signature from this bond, or restore letter or word of my correspondence with Lord Robert. And yet, the fellow has roused my curiosity. I would fain see him again, and alone. By my knighthood, I should like to try a fall with him, if it were only to prove to those paltry interlopers in my trade, that the Ambassador of England is made of different stuff from the feeble puppets that men call Royalty."

The soliloquy had been spoken aloud, and it almost seemed as if it had been listened to, for the door was suddenly opened by the velvet-coated major-domo.

"There is one here, Sir Robert," said he, "who insists upon speaking to you upon instant business." And ere he was able to receive either the assent or the denial of his master, there entered, following close upon his heels, the Signor Octavio Baldi.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TWO ENVOYS.

It is difficult to express the astonishment of Bowes at the appearance of the new comer. But even that feeling, strong as it was, gave place to his anger—for his pride was great; and to have a visit intruded upon one of his rank, more especially by a man of a grade so inferior, was to the last degree intolerable. His long experience, however, in diplomacy, had habituated him to a control of his feelings; and by a strong effort, he mastered himself.

"It is as well as it is," said he to himself. "This fellow's success has turned his brain. Our paths cross. We must have met some

time; and it is best that we meet now. My influence with James and his wife would be lost for ever, did they dream that I had a master. By the God that made me! I will teach him, ere he depart, the danger of intruding himself where he is not wanted."

It has taken some time to express the ideas that flitted through his brain; but scarce an instant was occupied in their passage. With a cold and haughty air, he bowed gravely to the Italian; and then turning to his domestic.

"Davidson," said he, "the gentleman, though unexpected, is at least welcome. Leave us."

The major-domo withdrew, and the host and his visitor were left alone.

There was silence for awhile. Bowes seemed uncertain what to say; and the Italian, as if conscious of his intrusion on the presence of a man of rank, infinitely higher than his own, contented himself by repeating at intervals the profound obeisance with which he had saluted the Ambassador on his first entrance.

"Sit down," said Bowes at length, "I pray you be seated."

With the words he pointed to a chair, and at the same time resumed his own. The Italian obeyed, after having by a fresh inclination, signified his consciousness of the honour of sitting in such a presence.

There was once more silence. For a minute, Bowes bent a keen glance on his visitor, but the scrutiny, if it were intended to abash the new comer, was unsuccessful. Eye and feature retained their usual calm expression, and the perpetual smile still played about the mouth.

"I don't know what to make of that fellow," said the Ambassador to himself, "the upper and lower part of the face scarce seem to belong to the same man. He is as cool, too, as if he had been accustomed all his life to associate with nobles, instead of blowing bellows and handling tongs. But I must assay the stuff he's made of."

"Signor Octavio," said he, "for such, if I err not, is the designation you assume;—you come in a happy hour. At our last meeting, our parting was so sudden, that I was unable to make the enquiries my duty required."

"And may I ask," said the Italian, in a quiet tone, "their character."

"Certainly. As the Ambassador of the Queen of England, I may be considered as representing not merely the dignity of my country, but its executive, and it became my duty to make inquiries as to any traveller, whose objects or intentions I doubted."

"Where did that traveller pursue his peregrinations?"

"Such a question is surely unnecessary. On the banks of the Tyne."

"Ah! I remember. In England. But I was misled by your speaking of yourself as an Ambassador."

"Why, so I am."

"It is true—north of the Border. I had fancied that the valley of the Tyne had been to the south of it."

Bowes's cheek flushed crimson.

"You come, Sir Stranger," said he, "from Machiavel's country, and have, no doubt, studied in his pages to quibble with words. But we will put the matter on another footing. I am

a Great Vassal of the Bishopric, and, as such, am entitled to examine or arrest, any suspicious person found within its bounds."

"The observation is just;—most just; and who was the traveller who excited your suspicions?"

"Yourself!"

"Sir Robert Bowes is too learned, in the logic of schools, to assume a fact without a reason. May I inquire why I was suspected?"

"The kingdom of my mistress is a Protestant one, and holds as enemies, the Pope and his countrymen. You are an Italian."

"I do not deny it. But pardon me for saying, that that is a fact, which, on the banks of the Tyne, at least, was not dreamt of by your Excellency."

Once more Sir Robert bit his lip.

"You are quick witted, Sir, but there were other causes for doubting you to be a true man. Your bearing and expression, were those of a well-born gentleman—your garb, coarse, if not mean. Was not that sufficient reason for

believing that you were other than what you affected to be. You may have heard the adage 'where there is mystery, there is plotting.'"

"Precisely the proverb that I quoted to myself, when my eyes first lighted on the yeoman who joined us from the Streatlam Road."

Sir Robert crimsoned even to the temples, and for a minute affected to employ himself in trussing the points of his hose.

"You are insolent, sirrah," said he, at length. "But I might have expected it. The man that steals a horse, will not hesitate to bandy words."

"As far as I am concerned, the charge is unfounded. The horse I rode, I purchased, and there," continued he, as he produced a paper from his pocket-book, "is the warranty for its payment."

"And yet—for I have learned of your companionship with Kinmont Willie—you cannot deny that the theft was committed by your mate."

"Travellers have occasionally strange mates.

and folks may be at daggers drawing with their companion in the *inside* of an ale-house, as well as on the out."

"What mean you," said Bowes, in amazement.

"Nothing; save that the yeoman I spoke of, might have chanced to meet with an acquaintance, and been as indignant at his language, or his acts, as I at Kinmont Willie's."

Bowes pushed his chair back, under the influence of his surprise, and then bending forward, cast a hurried and anxious glance at the face of his companion. There was nothing to read. The eye, as before, was calm and cold. The mouth retained its perpetual smile.

"I understand you not, Sir Italian," said the Ambassador. "You speak in enigmas, but I will no longer dwell upon a journey, whose recollections must be painful to you. You are here in a new character. The threadbare raiment is thrown aside, and you now wear a suit almost as fine as—"

"As that worn at present by your Excellency."

Bowes winced under the remark, though he did not affect to observe it.

"And now," continued he, "will you do me the favour to inform me to what a humble individual like myself is indebted for this visit?"

"It was to pray assistance from you."

"Pray assistance from me?" said Bowes, in a satirical tone. "The trouble was surely unnecessary. And in what way, may I ask, and for what purpose?"

"I would fain establish myself at Court."

"If what I hear be true, the feat is accomplished already."

"Why think you so?"

"Because you have found favour in the eyes of King and of Queen."

"Ah! So far I am fortunate, for I had before me an example. Sir Robert Bowes is alleged to have devoted years to winning influence with both, and I did my best to tread in his footsteps."

"Indeed! We are rivals then?"

The manner, and the accentuation were to

the last degree insolent, but the Italian seemed unable to discover anything but civility in the language, for it was in the tone of one who received a compliment, that he replied:

"Your Excellency does me the honour to say so."

"And yet," said Bowes sententiously, "mere Court favour is in itself contemptible."

"Beyond a question."

"Then why seek it?"

"For that, for which it is alleged it has been sought by the distinguished personage I spoke of—as a means to obtain an end."

"Ha! you have an object?"

The Italian bowed.

"And may I learn it?"

"Assuredly; and the more so, as it was for the purpose of intreating your Excellency's aid in securing it, that I came hither."

"But the object, Signor—the object?"

The Italian simpered, stammered, fingered the brim of his hat, and then with the fluttered air of a bashful schoolboy, replied:

"Marriage."

"Marriage!" exclaimed Bowes, in undisguised astonishment. "By my troth, Sir Italian, you lose no time. Scarce a week in the country, and in love! And yet," continued he, as he surveyed his companion from crown to heel, "you have passed that first youth which alone might have excused such precipitancy."

"Alas! Age is no preservative against the blind God's influence. I have known among his votaries even men old enough to be my father."

The shot might have been a chance one, but it evidently told, for Bowes coloured.

"And who," said he, at length, "is the happy dame, to whom so distinguished a person as the Pedlar of Venice, deigns to throw the handkerchief?"

"Mistress Mary Ker."

"Who!" said Bowes, as he started from his chair, almost speechless with amazement, "who did you say?"

"Mistress Mary Ker," was the reply, but uttered in the usual quiet tones of the Italian.

"Ha! You are presumptuous, Sirrah. Do you know that the young lady is noble?"

"That is a matter of which I have taken care to be well assured."

"And the heiress of broad lands."

"To one, who, like myself, have been accustomed from my youth, upwards, to calculate profit and loss, that fact also was not without its interest."

"And is Mistress Ker aware of the honour which you intend her?"

"She is not."

"And do you," said Bowes, in a burst of indignation he could no longer control, and which made him for the moment, forget his own proceedings, "do you suppose, that our Northern maidens are at the beck of any man's bidding, and may be compelled, like a Circassian slave, to marry whom they would not?"

"I understood so, Sir Robert; but in this you will correct me, if I am in error, as your superior knowledge of the laws of the

country, must make you a sure evidence. I was informed, that a maiden, when the ward of a superior Lord, was dependent on him for the selection of a husband, and had no choice but to obey. Is it not so?"

The remark appeared to embarrass Bowes, and, for a moment, he was silent. "But supposing," continued he, at length, as his self-possession returned, "supposing it were so, you forget that the consent of the superior Lord must be obtained."

"Undoubtedly."

"And that Mistress Ker is a Ward of the King's?"

"I was given to understand as much."

"And, moreover, one of the Queen's maidens."

"That is exactly to what my information went."

"And that, in such matters, King James never gives his sanction, except by the advice of his royal Consort."

"In all this, I am happy to say, my authority was correct."

"Well, then, you see you have no chance."

"Of what?"

"Of winning Mistress Ker's hand."

"Why?"

"Because you could never gain their Majesties' consent."

"It is a matter in which, I am happy to say, your Excellency is wrong."

"Impossible."

"True, nevertheless; for I am proud to be able to inform you, that I have already obtained to my petition, the signatures of both."

"What, Sir Italian!" said Bowes, as he once more started to his feet, "do you mock me?"

"I have too great a respect for your Excellency, to entertain such a purpose, even in thought; but as you persist in your incredulity, I would prove my words."

And he held up before the eyes of the Ambassador, the contract of sale, which he had scrolled in the King's private chamber, and which bore the signature of James and

of his Consort. The precious document, however, was not entrusted out of his own grasp, and as soon as he was satisfied that Bowes was aware of its contents, the Italian quietly replaced it in his pocket-book.

"It is incredible," muttered Bowes to himself, "positively incredible. That the King should have been fool enough for such an act, I can understand, but that Anne should have ventured to set me at defiance, is beyond my comprehension. But I must learn on what this fellow's power rests. It concerns me much to know it."

"You are a better diplomatist, Signor Octavio," said he, with a forced smile, "than I deemed of. Cecil could not match you. I have myself served an apprenticeship to statecraft, and have been thought to know something of my trade; but I confess I am a child compared with you. Condescend to instruct my ignorance. Inform me of the means by which you have gained your influence."

"Did not the voice of the whole Court last night proclaim it?"

"Pshaw! they spoke of magic."

"And why should they not have spoken correctly?"

"Pooh! Magic has only power over fools and women."

"You have seen the signatures to my bond—were you describing those who signed it?"

"You are right, Sir Italian," said Bowes, as his eyes flashed fire, "those who signed it, were, as you say, a fool, and a woman. But know that you have one now to deal with, who is neither. There stands before you now, a man who cares not for your incantations, if by incantations you have won this paper, and who says 'no,' to your presumptuous aspirations. Learn, Signor," continued he, in his haughtiest tone, and drawing himself up to his full height, "that *I* am a pretendant to the hand of the Lady you spoke of."

If the gesture and intonation were intended

to crush the ambition of the Italian, it seemed little successful, for with the same unruffled tone as before, the Signor Octavio replied,

"Your Excellency a pretendant to the hand of Mistress Ker! I understood so. You may recollect that you did me the honour to admit that we were rivals."

The cold placidity of the tone seemed to rouse Bowes almost to insanity, for it was with lips trembling with passion, that he continued,

"And did you know also, that the King and Queen had sanctioned my addresses by a document prior, and, therefore, superior to your own?"

"I learned also that," was the unconcerned reply.

"And how dared you, an insolent and unknown beggar, to cross my path, or to raise your eyes to a maiden, whom the Ambassador of England has honoured with his addresses."

"Because I thought that you might probably, abandon your rights to me."

"*I* resign my rights to *you*," exclaimed Bowes, in tones of the most intense excitement. "Why the man must be mad or drunk. Begone, Sirrah, and that instantly, or I make my knaves scourge you from the door."

The threat and the tone in which it was uttered produced no effect upon the marble like features of the Italian. He remained as before, lounging in his chair, and surveying the excited movements of his companion with the same unconcerned air, with which a visitor to a Lunatic asylum contemplates through an iron grating, the—to him innocuous—fantasies of its dangerous inmates.

"You would bid your knaves scourge me from the door, Sir Robert," replied he calmly. "Well, you have the power. But you are distinguished by your talents as a diplomatist, and you would injure your reputation for ability by an act of such bad policy."

"Bad policy, indeed!" said Bowes, stopping suddenly, as if he had been tamed into calmness by the impassive eye of his keeper, "and why bad policy?"

"Because if I were scourged here, I should be disgraced in Scotland."

"Well, what of that?"

"And to hide my shame, should be obliged to take refuge in the South."

"Well, I say!—I repeat, well?"

"It is possible that there I might find friends less disposed to treat me harshly."

"Pshaw! Is that all. Be gone, Sirrah, begone."

"Nay," said the Italian, rising from his chair as he prepared to obey the mandate. "Be it as you will. I was about to add, that the Sir Robert at Whitehall, might be a kinder friend to me, than the Sir Robert at Linlithgow."

"Ha!" said Bowes, as his cheek slightly paled, "you would seek Cecil. Do you know him?"

"I have seen him."

"And have credit with him?"

"Any man has credit with a Minister, who can tell him of what he knows not, and yet fain would hear."

The words were suggestive, and had their

effect upon Bowes, for he traversed the room with rapid steps, as if undecided what to say or do. His self communings, however, at length seemed to have led to some result, for he stopped suddenly, and again, but in a tone more conciliatory than before, addressed his visitor.

"I would not be discourteous in my own chamber, Signor, but you have roused feelings which ought to have been respected, and cannot complain of a violence which you yourself have caused. So once more I say begone, and in peace. What matters it to me," continued he in a half muttered tone, "what you say to Cecil."

"Nay, it was but a trifle;" continued his companion, in the same measured accent as before, "merely something touching the Lord Robert."

"The Earl of Essex!" exclaimed Bowes with a start?

The Italian nodded.

"And what can a Venetian pedlar, know of one of England's great nobles?"

"But little! Only that in my own country

it was whispered, that the young Earl aspired to the throne."

"Ha!"

"And that sundry of the mightiest of the Crown vassals, had bound themselves to support his ambition."

It might have been imagination, but Bowes fancied that the deep set clear eye of the Italian, fixed itself on him, as the words were uttered.

"And do you," said he, as he drew a long breath, "believe in such follies?"

"Nay, I repeat, I know but little of such matters, but it chanced that not long since, there came into my hands, a letter addressed to the Earl, by one of the great Barons I spoke of."

The agitation of Bowes became intense, and the perspiration stood in large drops upon his forehead. The face, too, grew deadly pale, and the eyes fixed themselves on the Italian, as if like a child fascinated by a rattle-snake, they were unable to withdraw their gaze.

"And have you," said the Ambassador,

in a tone almost inarticulate, "have you that letter?"

"I have."

"And may I see it?"

"I trust not," said his companion with a half smile, "a paper so important beyond my reach, but I do not object to make you acquainted with its contents," and he passed his hand within his doublet, as if he sought in some inner pocket for the precious document. For an instant, Bowes watched his movements, and then, as if from increasing agitation, his limbs were unable to support him, he sank down on his seat, and bending forward, covered his face with his hands.

In the mean time, there was the silence of death in the chamber, except that at intervals there came upon the ear the short thick beating of Bowes's heart. As for the Italian, he gazed at his victim with a keen penetrating glance, as if he had a pleasure in watching nature in its agony. A minute might have thus elapsed, and then as if unwilling to prolong the torture, the Signor Octavio drew from his doublet

a letter in a silk bound envelope He carefully unfolded it.

"Sir Robert Bowes," said he in a low but distinct voice, "I am about to read. So listen. This letter is addressed—

"'To the very Worshipful hands of the Earl of Essex, Lord Deputy of Ireland.'

"Its words are as follows:

"'Right Honourable, and my very good Lord. I have considered, since we met, the propositions of your Lordship, and will, in all my best, do your bidding. When the hour comes, of which you will be pleased to advise me, I will make for you with all the power I can; and so, long live King Robert!

"'Your Servant to Command,

"'Robert Bowes.

"'Given from my poor house at Streatlam, this 15th day of January, in the year of our Lord, 1599.'"

Bowes had not stirred, during the perusal of the letter. A minute had elapsed since the last

words fell upon his ear, and still he moved not. He raised himself, at length, and the two looked at each other. The gaze of the Italian, was calm and unimpassioned, as before. That of Bowes, became, by degrees, gloomy—menacing —fierce. All at once, he sprang to his feet.

"Villain!" said he, "you have my secret; but you shall never live to betray it."

As he spoke, he drew his sword, and rushed towards the Italian.

It is possible, that his purpose had been anticipated, for quick as thought, the Signor Octavio, after the fashion of his country, parried with his dagger the thrust, and ere it could be repeated, his rapier had crossed that of his opponent.

Bowes probably expected a speedy victory. Celebrated as the best swordsman in England, he had yet never met his equal; and he entered on the contest, in the full confidence that his enemy would soon be at his feet. If it were so, he was doomed to be disappointed. The Italian met the assault, with the coolness of a man confident in his own powers; and con-

tented himself with parrying the lightning-like thrusts of the long rapier, more with the air of a man who amused himself, than of one engaged in mortal combat. Suddenly, however, as if he were tired of a dull game, he made a step in advance, and by a sharp and powerful turn of the wrist, twisted the sword from the hand of his assailant; and the weapon of the unfortunate Ambassador of England rang through the air, and lighted in a far off corner of the chamber.

"Are you mad, Sir Robert," said he, in a cold tone, as he returned his weapon to its sheath. "Are you mad, I say? that you seek to murder men in your own house; or do you judge so ill of my discretion, as to suppose that I would place myself within your power? There," continued he, as he flung to him the paper he had read, "is your letter; but it is only a copy. The original is in other hands, and had you slain me, as you intended, it would have cost you your head. For the friend who is entrusted with its custody, had sure orders to forward it to Cecil, in case aught had mischanced me.

But sit ye down, and let us talk over this, like one sane being with another."

So saying, he resumed his seat, and with a movement of the finger, intimated to Bowes to follow his example.

The crest-fallen Ambassador, prostrated by the unexpected termination of the adventure, obeyed in silence, and the two once more sat opposite each other.

"Sir Robert," said the Italian, "let us make short work of this business. Your life is in my power. I have no wish to injure you, nor will I do so, unless compelled by your own obstinacy. Now, hear me. You hold from the King, the Wardship and marriage of Mistress Mary Ker. You must resign it."

"Never!"

"Farewell, then. It is idle to attempt to reason with a madman. The letter must to Cecil."

"Are you serious?"

"Never more so."

"You presume on your advantages. A chance thrust has given you the victory."

"The victory was no chance one. I have mastered, ere now, better rapiers than that of Sir Robert Bowes. But the moments are flying fast; and mine are numbered. I must be gone. So again, I say, decide But bethink you well what you do, for I swear to you, by all you hold most sacred, that I will keep my word."

"But I love this girl, dearly!"

"So does another."

"But I have staked on this marriage, the hopes, the happiness, the ambition of a life."

"There are other hopes, other wishes, other ambitions dependent on it, besides yours; and they are those of one the maiden clings to."

The flush of jealousy, passed over Bowes's cheek and brow.

"No, no;" said the unhappy man, after a moment of mental torture, "it is impossible. I cannot resign her hand."

"If the letter go to Cecil, you must resign your own—aye, both hand and head; and I ask you, if the Lord of Streatlam, in his coffin, would be a winsome bridegroom?"

Once, and again, Bowes clutched the arms

of his chair, as if under the influence of some internal spasm; and then gazed long, and fixedly at his companion. But in the calm, decided eye of the Italian, he saw no means of escape—nothing to hope.

"Be it so," said he, at length, in the tone of one who submits to a necessity, he cannot control. "But if I do your bidding, what warranty, have I, that you betray me not to Cecil. Who are ye?"

"That matters not. It is you, and not I that receive life, and he who wins such a gift need not be over curious about the giver."

"Well then, I must trust you. So there is that accursed bond," and he took the paper from the drawer, and flung it towards his companion.

"What would you more?" continued he, in an irritated tone, as he read in the expression of the Venetian that he was still unsatisfied.

"But this, that you attach your signature here," and he placed before him the warrant which he had himself scrolled, and which already bore the names of James and his Consort.

The Baron of Streatlam submitted passively, and signed the contract. The Venetian passed his eye carefully over the document, to ascertain that all was valid. Everything was correct, and with a satisfied smile, he exclaimed :

" It is well, but I deprive you not at once of your bride, and her price. Within an hour you will receive your three hundred and twenty marks, your angels, and your bond to the King ; and now, keep faith, and I keep faith, and so farewell."

He left the room as he spoke. But long after he had quitted it, did Sir Robert still sit in his chair gazing at the door, through which had passed his unwelcome visitor, and with a troubled glance that seemed to bespeak a doubt as to whether he had been engaged in an interview with one of this world or the next.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE IDES OF MARCH.

We must return to the Lord Warden. He, as our readers are aware, had been present at the Court Masque, and like the rest of the spectators, had witnessed the presentation of the Italian to the Queen, and its results; but with less astonishment. The vaunts of the Signor Octavio had, in some degree, prepared him for a display of his influence; and his own roving life had done much to brush away those cobwebs of the brain, which manacled with their impalpable ligaments, the more homely wits of his home-keeping countrymen.

He was not, therefore, disposed like the rest,

to attribute the illness of Anne of Denmark to superhuman influence. Still that illness was undoubted—undisputed—real. It existed, and there must have been a cause for its existence, and that cause connected with the appearance of the Italian.

If the mystery were calculated to arouse curiosity, when it had reference to the Queen, its effect upon the King was still more extraordinary. Condemned as the Signor Octavio had been at one moment, by a measure of justice, which, if hurried was still decisive, he had at the next, been rescued by the personal interposition of his judge himself, made the object of attentions the most distinguished, and even honoured with a private interview. Who was this unknown stranger? What was he? What the secret that gave him this power? What the means by which he exercised an authority so despotic over the sympathies, or the fears of two beings so different as James and his Royal Consort.

Such were some of the thoughts that occupied Buccleugh on his return from the

palace on the preceding evening. He had, as may be recollected, made a desperate effort to save the life of the Italian; partly on the impulse of the moment, but chiefly in gratification of the kindly feeling which induced him to continue to a man for whom he had formed a sudden liking, a protection which he had already exercised so effectively. The invitation of James, had, for a while, removed his *protégé* from his presence, but he still lingered about the door, with the intention of watching the exit of his guest, and extracting from him some explanation of the extraordinary scenes of which he had been a witness. But when the town clock pealed midnight, and still he came not, the Lord Warden grew wearied of his solitary vigils.

"He may have left the palace," said he to himself. "There is a postern door opposite the church, which leads to the outer court. I must learn from the porter at the great gateway. He may be able to tell me if he has passed."

The enquiry was unsuccessful. Nothing had been seen of the Italian, and yet he could

scarcely have made his exit unnoticed, for a rumour of the scene in the ball-room had already been spread abroad by the menials, and his name was in everybody's mouth.

Heart-sick with the unavailing search, the young noble made his way to his own quarters, with a faint hope that the Italian had gone forth by some unexplained mode of issue, and returned to what, since his arrival at Linlithgow, had been his home. Once more he was doomed to be disappointed. To the eager questions addressed to his domestics, there was but one reply: no one had seen anything of the Signor Octavio.

Still unwilling to abandon all hope, the Lord Warden continued to pace his chamber—but as hour after hour passed on, and still his guest came not, he betook himself to his sleepless pillow, there to indulge in the reveries which we have already represented.

On the following day he rose late, but the subject of his evening meditations still occupied his morning thoughts.

"If he be true man," muttered he to him-

self, he will be here ere long. He gave me rendez-vous in this room at mid-day, and there go the hammers of St. Michael's. It is twelve at last."

Scarcely had the last echo of the Cathedral-like bell died away, when a buzz was heard below, as if something had produced unusual excitement in the household, and ere their master could inquire the cause, the door opened, and the Italian entered.

"You here, Signor!" said Buccleugh, in an excited tone.

"I thought you had expected me," said the new comer. "Was not this the hour appointed for our meeting?"

"It was; but—"

"But what?" said his companion with a smile.

"To say the truth, I scarce looked for your coming."

"You judge ill of the gratitude of my country. I have been a second time indebted to you for life. Do you think that men in this,

their brief pilgrimage, meet such friends often, or when they do, forget their kindness?"

"And you are here at last."

"Yes. In this room, I promised to free Mistress Ker from the persecution of the English Ambassador. You recollect?"

"I recollect."

"And you doubted me?"

"I will be honest—I did."

"Why?"

Buccleugh hesitated.

"Nay," said his companion, with a smile, "if you say it not for me, I must say it for myself. You held as of small account, (have you forgotten your words?) the aid of the Italian pedlar. Was it not so?"

"Methinks to one who reads so accurately men's thoughts, or men's memories, it is unnecessary to speak them."

"You mistrusted my power *then*. Are you equally incredulous *now*?"

Again Buccleugh hesitated.

"I will be frank with you," said he at length,

with a laugh. "I have seen so much since you and I parted, that I am willing to accept as true, any miracles that church or heretic may offer."

"And believe in the promises even of an Italian pedlar?"

"Precisely."

"Well, to believe in the incredible is faith, and faith should be rewarded. Yet something is needed for the completion of the miracle. The confessional is an institution of my country. Will you submit yourself to its rules?"

"It were but small sacrifice. A man need claim little credit for revealing his thoughts to one who appears able to read them without the asking."

"Your confidence in the prescience of your spiritual director is encouraging, so with your permission, my Lord Warden, we will take our seats, and I will begin my interrogatory."

Buccleugh obeyed, and the two tenants of the chamber placed themselves in the arm-chairs, which flanked either side of the fire-place. For

a moment, there was silence. The Italian bent his keen blue eye on the face of his companion, as if he would have read his inmost thoughts.

"You remember," said he, at length, "the subject of our last conference?"

"I am not likely to forget it."

"It was to devise some means of withdrawing from the hands of Sir Robert Bowes, the power which he had obtained from the King, for the enforcement of his marriage with Mistress Mary Ker."

Buccleugh made a gesture of assent.

"You would have prevented that marriage?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Nay more, to have prevented it, you would have risked life?"

"Even so."

"The greatness of the peril, is evidence of the greatness of the affection. You love this girl?"

"I did."

"And has the feeling no longer existence?"

"None."

"Yet I dreamed that love such as yours, would not be lightly placed, or lightly withdrawn."

"Nor was it so. Twice—for I know not why, but there is some secret influence which makes me speak more frankly to you, than to my own kindred—have I asked her hand, and twice have I been rejected."

"And now—at this very moment, if you had the power of wedding her, would you not consent?"

"Never."

"Forgive me for the doubt, but is this the truth?"

"The whole—the simple—the unvarnished truth?"

There was silence for awhile. The Italian seemed irritated, for his usually calm features lost their customary expression of repose, and a shade of dissatisfaction passed across his brow.

"Would that I had known of this sooner," said he, "for I have lost my labour."

"In what?"

"In this, that I have freed, and to no purpose the maiden from the fate she dreaded."

"You!" said Buccleugh, in amazement. "Have you done this?"

"Yes, and more, for I have obtained the power to assure her to yourself, as your bride."

"Impossible."

"See and believe."

And the Signor Octavio placed before the eyes of his astonished companion, the renunciation of Bowes, and the document which he himself had penned in the King's chamber, and which bore on it the signatures of the royal pair and the English Ambassador.

"Yes," said he, pointing to the papers before him. "Note you the wording of this, and observe you the blank line? By this formal document—and I understand the language of such, better than hammering chains or setting carcanets—King James grants the marriage of Mistress Mary Ker, one of the Queen's maidens to any one whose name may be filled in here. And now," continued he, seizing a pen,

"I am about to introduce the title and designation of Sir Walter Scott, of Buccleugh—Baron of Branksome, Lord of Liddesdale, and Warden of the West Marches."

As he spoke, he drew the table towards him, and was about to inscribe the names in question, when his hand was suddenly arrested by his companion.

"Never!" said he. "Not for the wealth of my broad lands, would I do that which I condemned in another. Had I been willing to wed the hand without the heart, it would have been an easy matter to have purchased the Wardship long ago."

"And do you refuse my offer?"

"Yes—I refuse it. Nay, hear me," continued he, as the Signor Octavio, with a gesture of annoyance, flung the precious document upon the floor, "and think not that because I reject your kindness, I am the less grateful for it. But I will be frank with you, for you have earned the frankness. I loved this girl. How fondly—how passionately, I need not tell. That love lives no longer. And

yet, at the price of life, for I confess my weakness, would I purchase that paper, were it only to humble her proud spirit, by making her the debtor of one whom she scorned."

"In a word you would revenge yourself."

"The revenge is, at least, a noble one."

"Call it what you may," said the Italian, in a low tone. "It is not the less revenge; and believe me, who, in a few years, have outlived most men's ages, that to will evil to others is but to nourish a viper in our own bosom. God help me!" continued he, in a desponding tone. "I little thought, when I wrung the paper from Bowes's clutches, that its new owner would have prized it so lightly."

"You wrong me. Wrong me cruelly! I would, I repeat, gladly purchase its possession with life. Nor regret the act," continued he, as he noted the desponding expression of his new ally. "In my hands, should you entrust me with it, it shall be the minister of sorrow to none."

"And what would you with it then?"

"Give it to her who ought to be its pos-

sessor. If I understand you aright, its holder has the power of declaring the name of Mistress Ker's future husband. That is a matter of which she herself should be the sole judge. I would then, if you will confide to me the paper, place it in the maiden's hands. There may come a day when she may meet one whom even she, considers worthy to be her future Lord. As for myself, I have no claim to the honour—no wish for it."

The words were bravely spoken, and yet it seemed to the Italian, that they were followed by something like a sigh. He smiled, and then looked grave.

"Oh! Cupid, Cupid!" thought he to himself. "They may call you King of Gods and men, but Pride is the mightier divinity."

He said nothing however. With a grave courtesy, he placed in the hands of his companion the dearly bought papers, and with the air of one who disclaimed further discussion, sought his own apartment.

CHAPTER XVII.

WAKING DREAMS.

Yes, the Italian was right, Pride had proved a mightier divinity than Love.

There is an old adage that words are things. They are more. The language which expresses a fact, is often more powerful over human feelings, for good or for evil, than the fact itself. When Mary first rejected the vows of the Lord Warden, the refusal had in no degree weakened affection, for its words, even though the decision they conveyed was painful, were in themselves conciliatory. But the interview on the banks of the Yarrow, had converted the admiration of the lover, almost into dislike; not because the second refusal had been more

explicit than the first, but because it had been accompanied by language which jarred on the feelings, and mortified the pride of the young noble.

When, therefore, on bidding Mary adieu, on the eventful morning that had decided his fate, Buccleugh disclaimed all intention of intruding again on her presence, and resigned all future pretensions to her hand, he spoke only his honest convictions. Nor were these feelings the ebullitions merely of a momentary petulance; they were the expression of a fixed and settled anger. As the Italian had phrased it, pride had conquered love.

It was thus with no feigned reluctance—no throbbing of the heart—no real wish to be summoned to the presence of one whom he had affected to avoid, that he had chanced upon Mary in the Royal garden. The sentiment of alienation was a real one; the unwillingness with which he had obeyed the signals, made him by Lady Beatrice to advance, the honest representation of his feelings and his thoughts.

Nor did the announcement of the pretensions

of Sir Robert Bowes, call up any softening influence. Pleasure, it is true, he felt none, at learning of the enforced betrothal: his nature was too generous to admit such a sentiment. But if there was no pleasure, there was, at least, no regret. And when he undertook a quarrel with the Ambassador, it was simply to perform the duty which he owed to Lady Beatrice, and her family.

Scarcely, however, was the conference in the Garden over, when this feeling changed, and a new and a more agreeable emotion came in its room. He had bound himself to a mortal quarrel. Be the cause of undertaking it, what it might, its object was to preserve Mary from the man she hated. Should he succeed, her freedom would be his gift. And what more soothing to his wounded pride, than to have a being so haughty indebted to him, the lover she contemned, for every thing that made life valuable.

It was revenge then, revenge in a noble shape, perhaps, but not the less revenge; and come in what form it will, there are few who

in their secret hearts, deny its sweets. It was, therefore, with unfeigned eagerness, that he had despatched Mowbray on his hostile mission to Sir Robert Bowes, and it was with the most poignant vexation, he had learned the refusal of the Ambassador, to entertain his challenge.

The proffered aid of the Italian had a second time roused him to action, for it offered for Mary one more possibility of escape. To say that he entertained belief in its efficiency, would be incorrect; but he had not the less welcomed it, in the hope, however faint, that the catalogue of chances, might enable the mysterious stranger to fulfil his pledge. Against expectation, against belief, almost against hope, the interference of his new ally had been successful, and the Lord Warden had eagerly grasped the documents that were to make Mistress Ker his debtor.

With such feelings, it can be easily understood, that not a moment was likely to be lost in their delivery. And scarcely had the Signor Octavio quitted the room, than the

Lord Warden summoned his confidential attendant—the young Borderer, whose whistle had so opportunely, in the court-yard of the palace, gathered to his master's aid, his fellow-clansmen.

"Jock," said he, "be off to the palace, man. Ask for the Lady Beatrice Ruthven, and tell her from me, that I would, and at her earliest convenience, crave an interview with her, upon the matter that she wots of."

His attendant departed, and in a few minutes, returned with a message that the Lady Beatrice would gladly receive the promised visit, and, on the instant, as the Queen had gone out hunting with King James, and there was nothing to interrupt the conference.

A minute was sufficient to complete his preparations. Buccleugh threw his cloak over his shoulder, placed the precious document in his breast, and alone, and on foot, proceeded to the royal residence.

In the chamber, in which they have been

already presented to our readers, sat Lady Beatrice Ruthven and Mary Ker.

Some twelve hours had passed since we were last admitted to their secrets, and yet, short as the period was, it had produced the most beneficial effects upon the invalid.

Disguise it as we will—plead as we may, the advance of civilization, or the intellectuality of our race, where is the mind that is raised above the belief in the marvellous and the supernatural. We mock at omens. We laugh at dreams. We meet the whisper, that there are agencies on earth and in air, which affect man's happiness, with the dogma of philosophy, that their existence has never been proved. But we do not the less, notwithstanding our confidence in the inductive sciences, bow down in our secret hearts before that invisible tribunal, which nature has implanted in the breast of every human being, and which makes the wise and the foolish alike find a charm in mystery.

Mary, like her kindred denizens of earth, was made of mortal clay, and with all her intelligence and powerful will, was not superior to the weaknesses which affect poor humanity. She was, moreover, a woman, and women, from the delicacy of their organization, have ever been more susceptible than the other sex of the influence of the ideal. It was thus, that the letter of the preceding evening, had laid strong hold on her imagination. There was, indeed, no proof of its truth. It might, as Lady Beatrice suggested — for she had become alarmed by the too sanguine expectations, which had so suddenly sprung into existence, in the mind of her young friend—have been only a coarsely planned and clumsily acted jest. It mattered not. That word HOPE—the solitary contents of the mysterious missive, had on the sick girl, a talismanic influence. The strength returned to her limbs—the light to her eye —the heart beat more calmly—the spirits

resumed their usual tone. A long and profound sleep had attested the value of the mental medicament; and Mary, with the hue of health once more upon her cheek, awaited the future with a calmness, that she herself, but a few hours before, would have deemed incredible.

There might have been another reason for a change so sudden: Mary loved.

Our readers are already aware of the peculiar character of her mind. The young heiress was romantic:—strange that a term that implies falsity, should be selected to personify the noblest qualities of our nature! She admired the great, the energetic, the self-denying. As she had told the Queen, the biographies of Plutarch formed her favourite study, and her heart beat and her cheek flushed, as she read of the self-sacrifice of Curtius, or the devotion at Thermopylæ. With her, hero-worship was a living and a real creed, and the Demi-Gods of the old Republics, true divinities.

It was precisely this feeling, that had originally made her indifferent to the addresses of the Lord Warden. He had person, position, wealth—all the material advantages of life; but to her thought, he wanted the Divine Essence — that loftier phase of mental energy and ambition, of united power and will, which elevates men above their fellows and their race, and gives them, for the moment, an equality with the higher intelligences.

And all at once, Mary found that she had erred. The man, whom, because he possessed the graces of a Court, she had judged to be unequal to anything beyond such possession, had at once become enshrined in her memory, among the beings who had been the object of her secret adoration. Buccleugh had undertaken to do mortal combat with Sir Robert Bowes.

It is true, that he had intimated distinctly enough, that he exposed himself to the chances of almost certain death from no love for herself, but simply to discharge

a debt of gratitude to Lady Beatrice. One might have supposed that her having no personal interest in the matter, would have been sufficient to exonerate the fair daughter of the Cessford from all gratitude for his undertaking it. Yet strange to say, such are the contradictions of human nature, or female nature, that it was precisely this, which, in Mary's eyes, gave the act its greatest charm. Had she been still the object of his attentions, the heroism would have been less attractive, because it would have been heroism expecting its reward. But that a man should face death in a contest with so redoubted a swordsman as Bowes, who, on too many occasions, had given evidence of the fate that awaited his antagonist, and that he should have done this, merely to discharge the obligations of duty, was to approach the old Roman standard, by which Mary had taught herself to estimate man's worth, and entitled the Lord Warden to be enrolled among that glorious band, whose acts and aspirations

had formed the subject of her daily studies and nightly dreams.

Yes. The young girl loved: and love on her, as on others, exercised its usual influence. It created for her a new world. It lent its colouring to everything around her, and the bodily eye, borrowing its focus from the mental vision, discovered in existence, a charm hitherto unknown in it. Beneath the magic prism, all nature became tinted with fresh beauty. The sun shone brighter—the birds sang more cheerily—the very turf wore a greener and fresher hue, and Mary looked forth from her own heart upon the outer world, as upon a fairer scene, than had ever before pleased her fancy or dwelt in her memory.

And yet the picture was not without its shadows. Her lover, at length, was discovered to be worthy of her affection, but then came the bitter thought—he was no longer her lover. She had flung from her the jewel ere she was conscious of its value. Could she recall it at will?

Upon this Mary pondered long and anxiously.

Every word—every gesture which the Lord Warden had used on that fatal interview, were carefully summoned back by her too faithful recollection—and her cheek paled, and her eyelid trembled, as she remembered glance, and expression, and tone. Her own language, too, was carefully analyzed—the contemptuous terms used by herself—the imprecations of her nurse—the decision and the departure. The retrospect was not satisfying, and the tears streamed down her cheeks. The more she reflected on the past, the more she became assured that she had created between herself and the Lord Warden a gulf, which neither he nor she could pass—and despair was sinking on her heart, when her eyes once more lighted on the enclosure of the mysterious missive. There, before her, lay the treasured slip of paper, and on it, traced in bold, clear letters the word HOPE.

"It is my talisman," said Mary to herself. "I will pin my faith to it. It could not, at such a moment, have presented itself to my sight, had it not been intended to whisper to me of a brighter future."

The words were spoken inwardly. Not a sound fell upon the ear. And yet they were neither unnoted nor misunderstood.

By the side of Mary, sat Lady Beatrice, and with a keen and practised eye, she had watched the sunshine and shadows that had each in turn passed over the young girl's ingenuous brow. Not a movement—not a thought had escaped her. The sigh and the smile—the hope and the despair—the building up of the airy mansions of future happiness, and their overthrow—the glance at the mysterious word, and the blush that followed it—all had been marked by the anxious eye of affection, and told of each change that had come over the maiden's dreams.

Beatrice sighed. Intimately acquainted with Buccleugh, from their long sojourn in Italy, she was more deeply read than Mary in the secret springs of his character, and knew well that beneath his apparent indolence and foppishness—his vaunted passion for velvets and lace, jewellery and dress—there ran a deep current of energy, and ambition, and pride, that augured ill for the hopes of her friend. What augured

worst of all was, that he was easily swayed in trifles. And the shrewd daughter of Lord Gowrie was inclined to suspect that in him, as in most, the same facility which in minor matters made him the slave of other men's wills, was apt, when he was once fairly roused to interest and action, to assume the character of more than firmness—of obstinacy.

Such were the reveries that had flitted across the minds of the Queen's maidens, as, seated in the chamber of Anne of Denmark they awaited the return of their mistress; and it was at this moment, that the Laird's Jock, as the confidential attendant of Buccleugh was termed, appeared, and delivered to Lady Beatrice he message of his master.

END OF VOL II.

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